

MUNICH: BEFORE AND AFTER

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PREFACE

THE FOLLOWING PAGES PRESENT IN BROAD OUTLINE the story of the British Government's efforts, in 1937, 1938, and 1939, to save the nation and the world from war. The period divides itself into two parts the first, which became bitterly controversial, up to the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, the second, in the spring and summer of 1939 when, though the policy of negotiation with Germany in preparation for a general settlement was abandoned as hopeless, there was still ceaseless endeavour to prevent war.

At the beginning of the second phase, the British guarantee of Poland was accepted by a united Parliament and endorsed by all sections of the public. It was the measure of the nation's resolve to resist further German aggression. Before the occupation of Prague no British Parliament would have approved such a commitment in eastern Europe, but now, if it had not been proposed by the Government, it would have been demanded by Parliament and people. It had become a condition of national unity.

The bitterness born of past events still persisted, and, when war came, Labour and independent Liberal leaders refused to take office in the Government under Neville Chamberlain. "Appeasement" was denounced as dishonourable. Those who shared the responsibility for it are still regarded in some quarters as thereby disqualified for public office.

It is time to remind the country what really happened in the two years before the war. Events then grew out of the conditions left by the previous war, and they must be judged on that background. Enough is said here, and no more than enough, to link up the early 'twenties and the late 'thirties.

This does not pretend to be a review of British foreign policy during twenty years, nor even during two years. There is only passing mention, for example, of the Spanish Civil War and the Sino-Japanese War. Attention is concentrated on the British

Government's attempt to secure a preliminary agreement with Germany as the essential first step towards a European settlement. The narrative shows that at every stage of this policy the Government had predominant public opinion on its side. On the morrow of the Munich Conference, as will be seen in Chapter XIV, newspapers of all parties were almost unanimous in approval. Attack later was concentrated on Chamberlain and, because of that, I have drawn mainly upon his speeches for official exposition of Government policy.

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*it is said that no one who approved of
Munich should be allowed to hold office To
do that would be to cast a reflection upon the
great majority of the nation at that time*

Mr Churchill, in the
House of Commons,
January 27, 1942

CHAPTER I

The Years of Faith

THE CRISIS OF SEPTEMBER, 1938, WHEN WAR WAS delayed for a year, sprang directly from British (and French) military unpreparedness. But it is not true that this was the prime motive of Neville Chamberlain's peace policy. He believed that peace was the country's first interest, and he would have striven to maintain it however powerful our available military resources. It was Hitler who exploited our weakness. German rearmament began three years before our own. In circumstances the most favourable it must have been several years before we could have been on approximately even terms, and Hitler was not the man to wait till that stage was reached. He, therefore, forced the issue in central Europe. If the French Government had decided that their treaty obligations compelled them to go to the aid of Czechoslovakia in 1938 we should have fulfilled our own pledge and given France full support. That contingency did not arise, and, short of it, considerations of prudence became paramount if war there must be, let it not come at the worst time for ourselves.

But why, after the agony of the war of 1914-18, were we unready in September, 1939, and still more unready in September, 1938? The reply is found in the peace settlement of 1919 and the confidence in the League of Nations which persuaded the statesmen and people of this country that great armaments were no longer necessary. Belief that League safeguards would prevent the recurrence of war was encouraged by the leaders of all parties.

For four and a quarter years the Allies had fought "to end war", and they were victorious. The Empires that were our most powerful enemies had vanished. Germany was being disarmed and, so it was supposed, would be burdened for a long stretch of years with heavy reparation payments. The Austro-Hungarian Empire had fallen to pieces. Russia, gone Communist, was self-centred, isolated, virtually outside the European system. And,

if trouble came, there was the League of nearly all the nations in the world vested with a mandate to maintain and, if need be, enforce peace everywhere. The United States soon broke away from this insurance system. But, though she was no longer with us she was not against us, and she would never be our enemy. So faith continued to burn clear and strong. War was no more. The League was sacred, inviolable, its power, wisely directed, was irresistible.

France never accepted that faith. At the Peace Conference she wanted to set the German frontier back to the Rhine, and she reluctantly abandoned that plan only because of the Anglo-American guarantee of French independence and integrity. The defection of the United States cancelled the guarantee. France felt that she had been very badly let down. Her territory had been invaded twice in less than fifty years and, looking to the future, she was not greatly impressed by the idealism that was the vogue across the Channel. She found no comfort in visions. It was solid, material compensation that she demanded. The League was valuable to her in so far as it maintained the settlements of the Versailles Treaty and kept Germany under restraint. Failing that, she would not, and she never did, regard it as adequate safeguard of her own security. The new States carved out of the old Empires were settling down and France soon found allies among them—Poland, Czechoslovakia, Jugoslavia, and, later, Rumania.

On this side of the Channel, the prevailing opinion was that the French should put their full trust in the new organisation for collective security. She might have done if the United States had remained in the League and had stood fast by the Anglo-American guarantee. Repudiation of that engagement was fatal to the new order set up by the Peace Treaty. But the British public did not realise, and their leaders failed to tell them, how tremendously the League was weakened by the withdrawal of the United States. The League of Nations Union, in which all parties were represented, maintained the view that it still possessed overwhelming strength, and in the emotional mood which the Union fostered there was reluctance to admit that this strength could be undermined.

The representatives of Governments who periodically assembled at Geneva were not so confident. Among statesmen, trust in League safeguards began to weaken. Member-States were soon unwilling to accept the automatic obligation to resist aggression which the constitution of the League imposed. This was recognised in a resolution passed by the 1923 Assembly that it was for each State to decide for itself in what degree, if any, its military forces should be employed in resisting acts of aggression against other members. The decision was not unanimous. Persia voted against it and so it was not incorporated in League law, but it did become effective.

But in League politics this new fundamental doctrine of safeguards was for the time secondary to two problems of immediate urgency. One was disarmament, the other reparations. Disarming was being enforced in Germany and the Peace Treaty intended that the other Powers should follow it by a general limitation. There was, indeed, a definition in the League Covenant of what should be the new standard of armaments: it was "the lowest point consistent with national safety and the enforcement by common action of international obligations." In this declaration the Allied Powers, or most of them, were at the time perfectly sincere. Disarmament was desirable and desired for financial as well as other reasons. But, as we shall see, collective action was first deferred and then abandoned. Yet Britain disarmed and kept on disarming until her military establishments fell below the Covenant's proposed new standard. Her example was not followed.

The story of reparations is instructive. It was not till April, 1921—fifteen months after the signing of the Peace Treaty—that the Reparations Commission fixed the indemnity which was to be exacted from Germany. The amount was £6,500,000,000. A first payment of £50,000,000 was made three months later—with funds provided by a loan from London financial houses. Next year there was a partial moratorium. Meantime, the Allied Powers had not decided how to deal with their debts to one another and to the United States. It was a tangle so unpromising that in August, 1922, Balfour, then Foreign Minister, informed the Allies who were indebted to Britain that his Government was

prepared to abandon all further claim to reparation from Germany and repayment of war debts if this formed part of a general settlement, a settlement, that is, which included America Bonar Law, who succeeded Lloyd George as Prime Minister in the following October, went further He was prepared to accept a final settlement that left Britain burdened with an "indemnity"—that is paying more to America than she received from her war debtors, including Germany

Poincaré, then head of the French Government, loathed the British attitude and took the earliest opportunity of showing how Germany could be brought to her senses In December, 1922, a delay in the delivery of reparation timber—Sir John Bradbury called it "trumpery"—was brought before the Reparations Commission and, against British opposition, Germany was declared in default French and Belgian troops at once marched into the Ruhr and there remained for many months The results were disastrous Germany could not resist by force, but there was obstinate passive resistance and a good deal of political disorder (in which Adolf Hitler was first heard of) Trade collapsed and the mark became worthless Nor did France get any profit before the occupation of the Ruhr ended, the franc had depreciated by over 20 per cent

The question now was not how much Germany ought to pay, but how much she could or would pay to countries that did not want her merchandise There was unemployment in Britain, and inflated imports would put more of our people out of work General Dawes, an American, was called in to direct an investigation into Germany's position The result was the temporary Dawes Plan which provided for annual payments, beginning at £50,000,000, and rising in five years to £125,000,000 Germany's republican Government accepted this at the London Conference in 1924 (the year of our first Labour Government)

At once the European outlook brightened Statesmen were encouraged to make fresh efforts to find safeguards against war But it was outside the League, in Germany, that the most promising development began In 1922, and twice in 1923, the Berlin Government had suggested to France that there should be mutual guarantees against aggression On a hint from the British

Ambassador in Berlin, Lord D'Abernon, the proposal was again communicated to Paris in February, 1925, and, shortly after, to London Italy and Belgium were brought into the negotiations that followed In October, representatives of the five Powers met at Locarno and framed the famous Treaty which was named after that charming city Great Britain was therein pledged to go to the assistance of either France or Germany against the aggression of the other Belgian independence was also protected by the Treaty That Britain could have been drawn into war on the side of Germany was most unlikely But the Treaty served its immediate purpose Sir Austen Chamberlain, whose warm support as British Foreign Minister had made it possible, described it as the dividing line between the years of war and the years of peace

For a short time it appeared as though that forecast might be justified Under the leadership of Dr Stresemann, Germany was coming into friendly relations with her neighbours In 1926 she was admitted to the League of Nations In 1927 the Ambassadors' Conference declared that she had fulfilled her disarmament obligations In 1928, with nearly all other Powers, she signed the Kellogg Pact renouncing war as an instrument of policy In 1929 German representatives sat on the Commission which produced the Young Plan for what was thought to be a final settlement of reparations The question came up again, however, at the Lausanne Conference in 1932 By that time the Allied Powers were sick of it, and reparations were abolished, subject to the transfer by Germany to the Bank for International Settlements of 5 per cent redeemable bonds with 1 per cent sinking fund to the amount of £150,000,000 But ratification of this was dependent on agreements with the United States, which were not made

Eleven years had passed since the indemnity to be exacted from Germany was fixed at £6,500,000,000 Some sporadic payments were made, but the total was much less than the loans that Germany obtained from abroad, mostly from America It was an economic and political fiasco

Stresemann died in October, 1932 Whether later events would have taken a different course had he survived and remained at

the head of the German Government has been and long will be the subject of speculation. He had brought Germany back into the comity of nations. Her currency had been restored and stabilised. No longer were foreign troops on her soil. For Germans who were not dominated by the passion for revenge there was every inducement to continue Stresemann's reconstruction policy. Dr Bruning, who succeeded him as head of the Government, did his best against strong and bitter opposition of which Adolf Hitler was the most active leader. Yet the revenge motive was strong even among the supporters of Stresemann and Bruning. Hitler was not then thought of as an international menace. In the second volume of his book, *An Ambassador of Peace*, published in 1929, Lord D'Abernon mentioned him only in a short footnote which said he was "fading into oblivion." The resurgence of Germany, Bruning said early in 1933, "was only attainable by peaceful co-operation with all nations," and loyal fulfilment of international agreements. But the country was by then in no mood to listen to maxims of good policy. The middle classes which might have given some welcome to them had been ruined by the collapse of the mark, disarmament had set great numbers of army officers free to make mischief, growing unemployment was about to give Hitler his chance.

It was now, when international conditions were making it more dangerous as well as more difficult, that the League began an intensive effort to secure some general disarmament. Six years had passed since, following the Locarno Treaty, the Preparatory Commission was appointed to bring it to an early issue. Little or nothing had been done. Of the Great Powers, Britain had disarmed without waiting for others to do the same. There was already a feeling in responsible quarters that the process had gone too far. But there was no general realisation of this, indeed, in Britain popular support of the League disarmament policy was growing. Expenditure on the defence forces was reduced by the Labour Government of 1929-31, and the National Government formed in 1931 cut it still further. Their excuse was that, for the time, the financial crisis was the greater danger.

Towards the end of 1930, the Preparatory Commission of the

League produced a draft disarmament convention. This was referred to the Disarmament Conference where it was overlaid with competing proposals. The prospect of anything useful being done steadily worsened. Hitler became Chancellor of the Reich three days before the re-assembly of the Conference in February, 1933. A few weeks later, Japan gave notice of her intention to leave the League. In June, the Conference adjourned till the autumn and its chairman, Arthur Henderson, went on pilgrimage to the capitals of Europe, appealing for the support of Governments and peoples. It was too late. In October, 1933, Germany withdrew from the Conference, and her resignation from the League followed. The general committee of the Conference met in May, 1934, but by then even the optimists at Geneva had lost faith and the long international campaign collapsed. The task now was not to disarm but to rearm. Yet in Britain a national movement against it was rapidly gathering strength. For fully two years longer this was sustained by intense moral fervour and feverishly exploited by the Labour Party.

CHAPTER II

Storm Clouds

ADOLF HITLER BECAME CHANCELLOR OF THE GERMAN Reich on January 30, 1933. No one then had any conception of what this would mean for Europe and the world. We saw him as an uneducated visionary of violent temper, a raging, tearing propagandist with no other experience of public life. It was the world-wide economic depression of the early 'thirties that gave him his opportunity. In March, 1932, the unemployed in Germany numbered over five millions. The financial position was made worse by the cessation of foreign loans. Dr Bruning's Premiership was shaken by the enforced abandonment of the proposed Customs Union with Austria. Though no foreign troops were left on German soil (the last to remain were withdrawn in 1930) the country still bitterly resented the Versailles

Treaty and the penalties it imposed. In all his campaigning Hitler was exploiting Germany's defeat and humiliation. Yet he never secured a majority of votes in free elections. When party manœuvring made him Chancellor, the Nazi Party which he led was less than a third of the Reichstag. He strengthened his position in the general election of the following March, but even then the Nazis and the Nationalists together had a majority of only thirty-three. It was enough. In less than three weeks Parliamentary Government was abolished. Majorities were no longer relevant in Germany. Hitler was dictator with absolute power, rival political leaders and parties were suppressed by force and terror.

The storm-clouds were gathering. But the British Government was still leading the forlorn hope of disarmament, the British public's faith in the League was so fervent that any weakening in its support was regarded as moral obliquity. Moreover, the grave financial crisis of 1931 had compelled economy. Expenditure on the Army, Navy, and Air Force in 1932-3 was the lowest for many years. Geneva was still the centre of foreign policy and it was assumed that the League's guarantee, plus the Kellogg Pact, plus the Locarno Treaty would, for a considerable time longer, prevent a major war in which Britain would be involved. Yet the Government was worried about the condition of the Defence Services, and a long investigation was begun.¹ Equipment and stores had fallen to a dangerously low level here, at any rate, it was necessary to catch up arrears with the utmost speed. As the months passed Ministers began to realise that much more than these arrears would have to be provided for. But the means did not exist. In spite of the warnings of the Defence Departments, the arms industries had been allowed to

¹ In the Statement Relating to Defence, March 11, 1935, Cmd 4827, it is made clear that the Government were warned of the dangers they were running. For example "Every year the state of our armaments has been anxiously considered, and if risks have been run they have been accepted deliberately in pursuit of the aim of permanent peace. In this way we have taken risks for peace" (paragraph 6). It is also stated that before midsummer 1934 "detailed and prolonged examination had been made into the serious deficiencies that had accumulated in our defence forces and defences" (paragraph 8, ii). It is obvious from this that investigation must have begun not later than the end of 1933.

fall into decay. The alarm was sounded in Parliament. In the House of Commons on January 7, 1934, Mr. Churchill declared that the growing disparity between British armaments and those of other Powers endangered the security of the country. It was the Royal Air Force that caused most concern. In 1918 Britain had more aeroplanes and a larger trained flying personnel than any other country, but now our Air Force was fifth in order of strength. This, the public were told, could not be tolerated. In July, 1934, the Government announced that the number of first-line aircraft was to be increased from 844 to 1,304 within five years.

Strange as it now appears, the Labour Party opposed that new standard as "unnecessary" and as encouraging "dangerous and wasteful competition" in preparation for war. It was grotesque. The Government had its faults but "preparation for war" was certainly not among them. Yet the belief that they were "wamongering" was widely held.

Before 1934 ended there were the beginnings of an international outrage which transformed the position in Europe. Italy picked a quarrel with Abyssinia. There was a treaty between them providing for arbitration on all their disputes. But Mussolini was bent on war. In March, 1935, Abyssinia appealed to the League. At the same time Hitler repudiated the military clauses of the Versailles Treaty and announced the reintroduction of conscription in Germany.

The position for the League was most embarrassing. Germany and Italy were still in opposite camps. Mussolini joined in the condemnation of Hitler's latest actions. But the dictators quickly saw that each could snatch advantage from the new situation. Hitler struck when the League Powers were preoccupied with Abyssinia. Mussolini could now be sure that they were very much concerned about Hitler. France, moreover, had made agreements with Italy only two months before—this was not yet known to the public—and was determined not to be drawn into conflict with her. In January Laval had given Mussolini an assurance that French interests did not conflict with his forward policy in Abyssinia. British representatives to the Stresa Conference (April) appear to have said nothing to

the Duce about it But the League must act Its prestige had suffered by the failure to restrain Japanese aggression against China, and this new challenge could not be refused

The crisis was nearing its peak when, in June, Ramsay MacDonald resigned the Premiership and was succeeded by Baldwin There was no change in policy MacDonald was a League man, and the strong line taken by the chief British delegate at Geneva in September showed that his successor was not less firm for "collective security" Sir Samuel Hoare, who had succeeded Sir John Simon as Foreign Minister, made a ringing declaration of Britain's policy It was one of "steady and collective resistance to all acts of unprovoked aggression", the British Government would hold to this with "firm, enduring, and universal persistence" It was too late Mussolini had gone too far to turn back Abyssinia was invaded on October 2 and the Council of the League at once branded Italy as the aggressor

The League then, for the first time, adopted a policy of Sanctions France supported it at Geneva and appeared to be zealous for action, though it was soon found that she would do nothing to make the policy effective An embargo on supplies of oil, which might have been most damaging to Italy's war organisation, was not imposed because, it was said, it could not produce the desired result without American co-operation The League was having a painful lesson on the difficulties of securing united action And there was another lesson of which the public heard nothing

To enforce sanctions was to run the risk of war, and the British Fleet in the Mediterranean was substantially reinforced It had been understood that if Italy attacked the Fleet the French would go to our aid The British naval attaché in Paris reported that nothing was being done to prepare for this contingency Our Ambassador thereupon saw Laval and heard from him a characteristically slim excuse for French inaction He said, in effect, that France would support us in case of need in any action taken under Article 16 of the Covenant (which the League had invoked) but that our Fleet in the Mediterranean had been reinforced before the League's decision and such

reinforcement was, therefore, outside League action! Laval knew, of course, that reinforcement delayed might have been too late to serve the cause which was France's as well as Britain's and the League's Our Cabinet considered the matter and the result was a plain question to the French Government with a request for a prompt reply—would France support us against Italian attack, or wouldn't she? To this, of course, there could be only one answer and Laval, cornered, had to give it French support was promised

While the war was raging and the question of an embargo on oil was being discussed there were secret discussions in Paris as to a possible compromise which might be acceptable both to the belligerents and to the League A representative of the British Foreign Office was drawn into these discussions towards the end of November, 1935 On December 6 the Foreign Minister, Sir Samuel Hoare, who was passing through Paris on his way to Switzerland for a much needed-holiday, had the first of a series of talks with Laval Before he left Paris he gave his assent to terms intended to be submitted to Mussolini and the Emperor of Abyssinia as a basis of peace negotiations It was proposed to cede to Italy even more Abyssinian territory than her forces had yet occupied and, as a solatum, to give Abyssinia an outlet to the sea through British Somaliland

Sir Samuel Hoare communicated the terms to the Prime Minister in London there was at the time no public announcement, except in Paris newspapers Mr Baldwin submitted the proposals to the Cabinet with his commendation, he thought he must stand by the Foreign Secretary His colleagues, taken by surprise, felt in their turn that they could not oppose the Foreign Secretary when he was supported by the Prime Minister Not many hours passed before they were confessing to one another that they had blundered

A week later Sir Samuel Hoare resigned In the House of Commons he made an impressive defence of the peace plan Mr Baldwin's speech was an apology for his own and the Cabinet's action There was, he said, a lack of liaison between London and Paris when the terms were being drafted; and he made a mistake in not insisting on Sir Samuel Hoare's return to

London before a decision was taken Mr. Baldwin might have added that the loss of liaison with the British public was equally serious Throughout the world Sir Samuel Hoare's speech at Geneva in September was accepted as the authentic exposition of British policy—"firm, enduring, and universal persistence" against aggression Only two months had passed since those words were spoken and, in the interval, there had been no suggestion that the policy so defined would be abandoned or diluted The proposal to dismember Abyssinia while the issue of the war was yet undecided was thus a rude shock to public opinion In a democratic State, Government policy which is supported, as this was, by a great majority of the people, cannot be abandoned without the decency of some prior explanation The proposed peace terms were generally regarded as a gross offence against a country of whose cause Britain had been the foremost champion

A case may be made for the Laval plan The action of the League Powers against Italy threw Mussolini into the arms of Hitler, and Hitler, in turn, felt he could safely go his own evil way while the League's attention was concentrated on Abyssinia What was in Laval's crooked mind it is impossible to say his assurance to Mussolini, and France's formal support of League action, enabled him to exploit both British statesmen were unable to play that game Having declared their "enduring" opposition to aggression they could not compromise their case a few weeks later, while the war was undecided, without destroying the nation's self-respect and its prestige

The Laval peace plan was dead, and Mr. Baldwin's choice of Mr Anthony Eden to succeed Sir Samuel Hoare at the Foreign Office was assurance that it would have no resurrection There was no more ardent supporter of the League than Mr Eden, and he was well known and liked at Geneva

But Mr Eden could do nothing for Abyssinia She had lost the war by the end of the winter, and on May 1 the Emperor Haile Selassie fled the country On May 9 the King of Italy was proclaimed Emperor of Abyssinia Sanctions were sadly withdrawn in July This defeat could not be isolated from the League's general position the prestige of the whole organisation

was profoundly injured by the failure to make sanctions effective or to mobilise international force against an aggressor. From the Opposition side of the House of Commons, the Government was charged with desertion of the League but, as a matter of fact, throughout the Abyssinian affair, Britain was the only member-State that made any preparation for supporting League policy by force.

There was a stricken field nearer home than East Africa. On March 7 Hitler denounced the Treaty of Locarno, and his armed forces occupied the demilitarised zones of the Rhineland. Moreover, Italy was definitely changing sides. In July, 1936, Germany and Austria came to an agreement in which Austria "acknowledged herself to be a German State," a phrase which Hitler could exploit though the agreement also recognised Austria's full sovereignty. Mussolini had approved the agreement beforehand. The Berlin-Rome Axis was about to be born.

CHAPTER III

Rearmament

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST REARMAMENT WHICH BEGAN in the early 'thirties was remarkable from various points of view. In its beginning it was much more than a party matter, though the Labour Party from the first exploited it with skill and energy. Its most important episode, the Peace Ballot, would have been impossible but for the immense influence of the League of Nations Union. Beyond question this was the most powerful voluntary and non-party political society which the country has seen. Conservative, Labour, and Liberal leaders gave it their countenance and support. Its branches covered the land, and the organisation was nearly everywhere efficient. Innumerable meetings were held in town and country and the movement was liberally supported by the national and local press. Inevitably, as the novelty wore off, the massive influence of the Union lost some of its strength but even then it was a

potent force with a core of zealous, enterprising advocates whose faith in the League of Nations was maintained with religious fervour.

For many years there was no conflict between the Union's activities and State policy. Both sought to magnify the League, both looked forward to international disarmament. Early in the 'twenties, a Rule of Guidance was adopted by the Government. It assumed that there would be no major war for at least ten years. This Rule was renewed annually until 1932 with the ten-year period unaltered. Its purpose was to divert from the military services expenditure that was thought to be more needed in other directions. The Baldwin Conservative Government, with Mr Churchill at the Exchequer, was responsible for it until 1929, the second Labour Government carried it on till 1931. British armament works were by that time in an advanced state of decay. Not only was there little business on account of the home Services, it was seldom that the Government would licence the acceptance of foreign orders. Abandonment of the Ten Year Rule by the National Government in 1932 brought no relief, as the Service Estimates were further reduced in that year, the financial crisis being regarded as more dangerous than the risk of war. Moreover, it was unthinkable that Britain, while calling upon other nations to disarm, should be increasing her own military expenditure. Yet there was not much hope of success at Geneva when, in 1932, Arthur Henderson opened the International Disarmament Conference. France still refused to disarm without security, Germany broke away after Hitler's accession to power, and disarmament soon ceased to be a policy that any European country could prudently pursue.

British support of it at Geneva continued to the very end of the period in which there was the slightest hope of anything being done. The League of Nations Union, with admirable reluctance to admit failure, continued its crusade even longer. Few recognised the extent of the defeat. There was still a strong faith in the League and its power to deal with any State or States that dared to make war. If that faith was justified armed forces were required only for purposes of police to maintain law and order on land and to keep open and safe the sea ways.

round the world. That these functions of defence could not be discharged without large increase of armaments, especially naval and aerial, was not yet realised by any considerable section of the public, nor admitted in action by the Government.

That British rearmament ought to have begun in 1933 or 1934, at the latest, few now dispute. Yet it was then that the Labour Party, with much support from outside its ranks, worked up a fierce campaign against it. The Government, which ought to have been condemned for not beginning to rearm, were denounced for "war-mongering", and at Fulham in the autumn of 1933 Labour won a resounding success in a by-election fought on that issue. The Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, was a pacifist, nobody could think of Baldwin, the second man in the Government, as a Jingo, and there was nothing in the actions, or even the undisclosed intentions, of their colleagues to justify the Fulham onslaught. But the Labour cry caught on. A wave of emotion swept the country. Memories of the last war were still fresh. The new perils in central Europe were not yet seen. We could and must still trust the League. It was our own Government that was the danger—if there was another war it would be the fault of the men in Whitehall! In the Oxford Union, undergraduates—incited thereto by Dr Joad—declared by majority vote that they would not fight for King and Country. And that was the mood among great numbers of young men and women in all classes.

The culminating episode in this strange period was the Peace Ballot. The prime aim of its organisers was to secure an immense vote for the League and disarmament. To this end, the questions to be voted on were so framed that almost anyone could give the answers desired. They were these:

Should Great Britain remain a member of the League of Nations?

Are you in favour of an all-round reduction in armaments by international agreement?

Are you in favour of an all-round abolition of national military and naval aircraft by international agreement?

Should the manufacture and sale of armaments for private profit be prohibited by international agreement?

Do you consider that if a nation insists on attacking another, the other nations should compel it to stop by

- (a) Economic and non-military measures?
- (b) If necessary, military measures?

It has been truly said that every member of the Government, without any strain of conscience, could have answered "Yes" to all those questions except one—the fourth, and if the policy of that had been adopted it would have had to be abandoned as soon as a big war was probable. Many people, including some old members of the League of Nations Union, refused to take part in the Ballot because they held that, for its avowed purposes, it was unnecessary and could serve no useful purpose. But its promoters could regard it as a tremendous success. It was by far the largest voluntary poll ever known in this country. The number of persons who signed the papers was 11,559,165, and overwhelming majorities of them gave affirmative answers to the questions. For the time, the effect of the Ballot was to strengthen faith in the League and so to discourage thoughts of rearmament. That the Government's hold on public support was not seriously affected was shown in the 1935 general election, a few months after the result of the Ballot was announced. The Government majority was 247.

There can be no question now that the agitation of 1933 and 1934 brought the State into serious danger. It will remain a classic example of how honest, well-meaning idealists and political zealots may become a public peril. The delay of British rearmament inflicted incalculable loss on the country. And, according to Mr Baldwin's "appalling indiscretion" in the House of Commons on November 12, 1936, this delay was due to the intimidation of the Government by public opinion. His political apologies were apt to be over-generous and on this occasion he went further than the facts warranted. "Democracy," he said, "is always two years behind the dictator." Why it should always be so, he did not say, but he did explain why there had been delay in this specific case.

Three years before, he said, "we were all worried," but a strong pacifist feeling was running through the country, the Fulham election was won by Labour, and "if we had gone to the country

on Defence then we should have lost" Some mocked at this confession, others it stirred to anger Mr Baldwin's colleagues were puzzled "It surprised us all," one of them said a few days after the speech "As a matter of fact, there was no postponement for two years of which the Cabinet was aware, certainly no postponement for any period for the reason he gave" And Mr Baldwin cannot have meant that after the Fulham election the Government decided not to proceed with the vast rearmament scheme of 1936, for the need for anything on that scale had not then been admitted But he knew in 1933, and earlier, that Defence expenditure had been reduced below the safety line, and that the Estimates for all the Services would have to be increased He knew also that the Labour Party would oppose any increase, and that it appeared to be gaining ground in the country

In his talks with MacDonald at that time, he may well have taken the view that the risks of delay were less than those of bold and immediate action Yet the result of the 1935 general election suggests that if ever the Government was in danger it was for only a very short time Developments in Germany were increasingly provocative Hitler had been pressing forward with preparations for rearmament on an immense scale As far as possible it was done secretly at first, and substantial progress had been made when, on March 9, 1935, foreign Governments were officially informed of the existence of the German Air Force A week later, Hitler announced the reintroduction of conscription and, by decree, fixed the peace strength of the army at about 550,000 Britain, France, and Italy protested, the Council of the League of Nations debated the new situation But nobody went beyond words

When he submitted the Air Estimates in March 1934, Sir Philip Sassoon said that, while Great Britain had followed a policy of studious moderation in air armaments for over fifteen years, some other nations had steadily increased their air forces which now far out-numbered ours In these circumstances he announced that the Government could no longer hold in abeyance the programme of 1923—for 52 squadrons In November of the same year, Mr Churchill moved, in an amendment to the

Address, that the strength of the national defences, especially in the air, was "no longer adequate to secure the peace, safety, and freedom of the country" Mr Baldwin then promised that we would not accept any position of air inferiority to Germany.

In March, 1935, Hitler told Sir John Simon that Germany had already achieved parity with us in the air, that she aimed at air parity with France and would be content with 35 per cent of British naval strength (this was embodied in the Anglo-German Naval Treaty) Mr Baldwin explained to the House of Commons that parity with us meant that Germany had about 800 first-line aeroplanes, parity with France—our aim also, he said—would be 1,500 An Air Raid Precautions Department of the Home Office was set up in 1935 and local authorities were informed of the measures necessary to safeguard civilians.

It was Neville Chamberlain, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, who, in a speech at Kelso on September 21, 1935—shortly before the general election—began to prepare the country for a great increase in the Defence forces. They had fallen, he said, to a dangerously low level. Knowledge of this on the Continent "has shaken the confidence of our friends in our ability to carry out our obligations, and it has encouraged others who are not so friendly to us to think that we can be treated with indifference, if not with contempt." We must face realities and recognise that disarmament must follow, not precede, the establishment of a sense of security.

Fortified by the result of the elections, the Government submitted their main scheme of rearmament to the House of Commons in March, 1936. It provided for an expenditure within five years of £1,500,000,000, a fifth of which was to be borrowed. There was strong and uncompromising opposition by the Labour Party and a vote of no confidence in the Government was moved. Mr Churchill's warnings were derided. Sir Stafford Cripps referred to him as "one of the wild men" and declared his preference for Mr Baldwin. In July, the Labour Party went into the division lobby against the Service Votes. For a year longer this complete opposition was continued, and in July, 1937, the leaders of the party wanted it still to go on. By then, however, the majority of the Labour members refused to

maintain that extreme attitude and rejected their leaders' advice
But this did not mean party support of rearmament

Except a few specialists, nobody then understood how long it must be before mass production could begin under the 1936 plans. Munition industries had mostly disappeared since 1918 except in the small number of factories that remained in working order, operations could not begin till buildings and equipment, tools and skilled labour were provided.

Baldwin had succeeded MacDonald as Prime Minister in June, 1935. His closest political interests had always been domestic. Special responsibilities in foreign policy now crowded on him. The German menace was growing. Japan's aggressiveness was disturbing the whole of the Far East. The Spanish Civil War began in July, 1936. Anxieties and worries told on his health, he suffered from sleeplessness, and a long rest was necessary in the late summer of 1936. When he returned to Downing Street in the autumn there was the nerve-racking strain of the Abdication crisis which imposed on him duties that he alone could discharge. He resigned the Premiership on May 28, 1937, immediately after the Coronation of King George VI.

That he intended to retire then had been known in the inner circle of his political friends for nearly a year. There was no rivalry for the succession. Mr. Baldwin decided to recommend the King to send for Neville Chamberlain and, in the event, the choice was approved by all his colleagues. Chamberlain was the man in the Cabinet whose advice they most valued and to whom they turned in any emergency. In the trying later months of his own Premiership, Mr. Baldwin played the leadership into his hands in a way that was without precedent. More than six months before he resigned there were some Government changes, including Cabinet appointments, and it was Chamberlain who, at the Prime Minister's request, selected the new Ministers.

Chamberlain, now sixty-eight, was in his fiftieth year when he was first returned to the House of Commons. No one who came there so late had ever before attained the Premiership. Like his father, Joseph Chamberlain, he distinguished himself in Birmingham public affairs before entering Parliament where his brother Austen had long been eminent. There is no truth in the legend

that Neville owed his rapid rise in national politics to Austen. Though their relations were always affectionate, they were not always in political agreement. Neville rejoiced in the fall of the Lloyd George Coalition Government of which Austen was one of the chief members. Austen, as a Coalitionist, was outside the Bonar Law Administration, Neville was a member of it and became Chancellor of the Exchequer before his brother returned to the councils of the Conservative Party.

Among those who were closely associated with him, the feeling for the Prime Minister was one of trust, admiration, and affection. Outside that circle his shy and reserved nature long caused misunderstanding. He was thought of as hard and cold, though he was most sensitive to any human suffering and instinctively sympathetic. Nor was he the hard-shell Tory that opponents often described him; he cherished a good deal of the old Birmingham Radicalism, and his mind was forward-looking. In foreign affairs, now almost wholly to absorb him, he had been close to the main current of British public opinion. The notion that in the Abyssinian crisis he was pro-Italian—in contrast with the anti-Italian Mr Baldwin—was false. No one was more strongly opposed to the Italian aggression, had the French been willing to co-operate, he would have supported action to prevent or stop the war by cutting Italy's communications with East Africa.

After slack leadership in preceding Administrations, there was need for the close interest which Chamberlain at once took in all Departments. As every Prime Minister must, he worked long hours and, with his quick mind and orderly business habits, kept up-to-date with the papers on all important affairs. Not for many years had this work—essential to efficiency in Government—been so well done. In the Cabinet his strong leadership strengthened the trust which his colleagues already reposed in him.

CHAPTER IV

The Opening Moves

CHAMBERLAIN CAME TO THE PREMIERSHIP IN MAY, 1937, with a haunting sense of peril to the world's peace. There was constant danger that the Spanish war would spread. The position in the Far East was getting worse. His Premiership had run less than two months when Japan began the undeclared war against China which still rages. Relations with Germany were most difficult, and Mussolini was now committed to close co-operation with Hitler. The new Prime Minister could not turn his gaze from the darkening shadow across Europe. There must be no more drift if he could prevent it. And as the greatest danger was from Germany he would make it his first aim to establish good relations with that country.

His directive influence on British foreign policy began before he was Prime Minister. Sir Nevile Henderson, then at Buenos Ayres, was appointed Ambassador to the Reich in January, 1937. In March he was in London and had a series of conversations with Ministers and others before going on to Berlin. It was two months before Mr Baldwin resigned the Premiership. In his *Failure of a Mission* Sir Nevile writes "My most important interview was with Mr Neville Chamberlain. Mr Chamberlain outlined to me his views on general policy towards Germany, and I think I may honestly say that to the last and bitter end I followed the general line which he set me, all the more easily and faithfully because it corresponded so closely with my private conception of the service which I could best render in Germany to my own country."

"I was above all convinced," Sir Nevile went on to say, "that the peace of Europe depended upon the realisation of an understanding between Britain and Germany. I was consequently determined, firstly, to do all in my power to associate with the Nazi leaders, and, if possible, to win their confidence and even sympathy; and secondly, to study the German case as objectively as possible and, where I regarded it as justified, to present it as

fairly as I could to my own Government To these two rules I adhered throughout my two and a half years in Berlin ”

The German Foreign Minister, Baron von Neurath, was invited to come to London The invitation was accepted for June 23 Before then, however, Spanish Republican attacks on German ships had angered Hitler and the visit was postponed It never took place The signing of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement on July 17, improved the atmosphere for a short time and our Government’s readiness to make the best use of the change was indicated by the Foreign Secretary, Mr Eden, in the House of Commons “There can be only one foreign policy for this country,” he said, “a willingness to co-operate with any country, whatever its form of government, that is willing to work for peace ” But months passed before opportunity came for even an approach to discussion with Hitler

The Prime Minister, meantime, turned to Italy Through the Foreign Secretary, he sent a message to Mussolini, who made a friendly reply Chamberlain then, as he afterwards told the House of Commons, wrote a personal letter to the Duce “expressing regret that relations between Great Britain and Italy were still far from the old feeling of mutual confidence and affection which lasted for so many years I went on to state my belief that those old feelings could be restored if we could clear away certain misunderstandings and unfounded suspicions, and I declared the readiness of His Majesty’s Government at any time to enter into conversations with that object I was glad to receive a reply from Signor Mussolini immediately, a reply in which he expressed his own sincere wish to restore good relations between our two countries, and his agreement with the suggestion that conversations should be entered upon ” The Duce mentioned the Anglo-Italian Gentleman’s Agreement of January, 1937, a bare outline which he suggested should be filled in and expanded

It was hoped to begin negotiations in September But here also, the Spanish Civil War thrust obstacles in the way Of the three Powers backing one side or the other Italy was the most provocative Russia, which had given considerable help to the republican Government, was too far off to be able to play a decisive part General Franco’s armies received large quantities

of munitions from Germany, as well as technicians and some fighting men. But Hitler, as we learned afterwards, was then concerned much more with his plotting against near neighbour States than with the Spanish conflict. It was Italy that sent the greatest military aid to General Franco. The pretence that the Italian forces in Spain were volunteers could not be long maintained. They were Italian army formations commanded by Italian generals and, whenever they distinguished themselves, their success was acclaimed in Rome as proof of the prowess of Italian arms. In Britain and France there was a strong demand that help should be given to the Republicans and, especially, that no restraint should be put on the supply of munitions to them. This demand was rejected by the Governments of both countries, and the Non-Intervention Committee was kept alive, though some of its member-States were themselves intervening.

On this question, there were no differences between Chamberlain and his colleagues. Right up to his resignation as Foreign Secretary, Mr Eden supported the non-intervention policy. Its justification was not always plausible. There was a widespread feeling in this country that the Republican Government was getting a rough deal and that if it failed—as it did—it would be because the British and French Governments deprived it of the aid it might have received had its friends been allowed to translate their sympathies into action. It may have been so. But throughout the conflict, and when it was over, the non-interventionists had no doubt that their policy (first proposed by M. Blum, the French Socialist Premier) was right and that the major consideration for Britain and France and the states which shared their view was to prevent the spread of the war. The controversies about all this were fierce and bitter and led to personal animosities that persisted after the Spanish war ended.

In the summer of 1937 there were mysterious submarine attacks on shipping in the Mediterranean. At a conference of Mediterranean Powers held at Nyon, on September 11, under the leadership of Britain and France, it was decided to establish patrols to put down this piracy. Italy at first refused to co-operate but, two months later, agreed to do so. The submarine attacks ceased.

At Geneva, on September 20, Mr Eden made a speech which, without mentioning it, had a bearing on Germany's claim for the return of the colonies she lost at the end of the last war. He said the British Government was ready to enter into negotiation with any Powers for an abatement of particular preferences in the Crown Colonies if they could be shown to restrict international trade. German newspapers derided this, attacked the Foreign Secretary, and tried to draw a distinction between his views and those of the Prime Minister.

Chamberlain consistently preached his gospel of peace. Addressing the Association of Chambers of Commerce at Manchester on October 14, he said

I doubt whether our foreign policy was ever less aggressive than it is to-day. If we are striving, as we are night and day, to rearm ourselves, it is not that we have sinister designs against anybody else. If we are attacked, we shall know how to defend ourselves, as we have always done in the past, but it is not in the temperament of our people to bear malice, and I think we have the shortest memory for quarrels of any nation in the world. Sometimes we are credited with a more than Machiavellian degree of cunning, but the simple fact is that the mainspring of our foreign policy is our desire to live at peace with our neighbours, and to use our influence to induce them if we can, should they have any differences with one another, to resolve them by peaceful discussion, and not by recourse to force.

On the following day at Llandudno, after speaking of difficulties about non-intervention, Mr Eden said

I am as anxious as anybody to remove disagreements with Germany and Italy or any other country, but we must make sure that, in trying to improve the situation in one direction it does not deteriorate in another. We are in a period of storm and challenge when the hope is openly aroused that the variety of international anxieties will prevent effective resistance to unlawful courses in any one sphere. This is dangerous doctrine. No nation will profit by such practices in the end. There will be a nemesis.

That there was little difference between the two men in their attitude to the League of Nations is shown by their speeches

during this period Chamberlain said at the Guildhall banquet on November 9

To us the League is not a fetish but an instrument the value of which is in direct proportion to its effectiveness. At the present time its effectiveness is seriously impaired because some of the most powerful nations in the world are not members, or are not in full sympathy with it, but our aim must be to strengthen its authority and thus so to increase its moral and material force as to enable it to carry out fearlessly and successfully the purpose for which it was originally founded.

Mr Eden, speaking at the hundredth session of the League Assembly at Geneva on January 27, 1938, said

The League can legitimately be proud of its achievements but there can be no advantage in shutting our eyes to certain events, however regrettable and however much we may deplore them. By the defection of some of its more important members, the League is now faced with the fact that the area of co-operation is restricted and that its ability to fulfil all the functions originally contemplated for it is thereby reduced. We are compelled regretfully to recognise the fact, but His Majesty's Government do not think it inappropriate at the moment, when they have to acknowledge the repudiation in some quarters of the League of Nations, to declare that their faith in the aims and ideals that inspired it remains unshakened.

The League had done a vast amount of good, and in some ways its activities were being fully continued. But in relation to the major international issues now threatening the world's peace it was virtually out of action. It could do nothing to stop the war that had broken out between Japan and China. It had no influence with Germany and Italy and, because of this, could not deal effectively with the problems arising out of the Spanish Civil War.

In November, 1937, direct contact between the British Government and Hitler came about in a curious way. An international hunting exhibition was held in Berlin during that month. Its chief promoter was Goering. There was a British section of the exhibition. It happened, moreover, that a distinguished member of the British Government—Lord Halifax, then Lord President of the Council—was a Master of Foxhounds. He

accepted an invitation to visit the Exhibition, and during the few days he spent in Germany he met leading supporters of Hitler and, at Berchtesgaden, talked with the Fuehrer for an hour and a half. The conversation was described by Lord Halifax as "free, frank, informal, and confidential." That it was regarded as important was shown by Mr Chamberlain's statement to the House of Commons on December 21.¹

It was never the expectation or the intention of His Majesty's Government that those conversations should produce immediate results. They were not negotiations and, therefore, in the course of them no proposals were made, no pledges were given, no bargains were struck. What we had in mind as our object, and what we achieved, was to establish personal contact between a member of His Majesty's Government and the German Chancellor, and to arrive if possible at a clearer understanding on both sides of the policy and outlook of the two Governments.

I think I may say that we now have a fairly definite idea of the problems which, in the view of the German Government, have to be solved if we are to arrive at that condition of European affairs which we all desire, and in which nations might look at one another with a desire to co-operate instead of regarding each other with suspicion and resentment.

If we are to arrive at any such condition as that, obviously it cannot be achieved by a bargain between two particular countries. This is rather to be considered, as we did consider it, as a first step towards a general effort to arrive at what has sometimes been called a general settlement, to arrive at a position, in fact, when reasonable grievances may be removed, when suspicions may be laid aside and when confidence may again be restored. That obviously postulates that all those who take part in such an effort must make their contribution towards the common end. On the other hand, I think it must be clear that conclusions cannot be hurried or forced, that there must lie before us a certain period of time during which further study and exploration of these problems must take place, and that what has happened so far is only the preliminary to a more extended but, I hope, a more fruitful future.

¹ Speeches in Parliament are quoted from the Official Reports.

Chamberlain added that in these conversations there had been no attempt either to break up or to weaken friendships and understandings already arrived at, or to set up *blocs* and groups of Powers in opposition to one another, certainly there was no question of drifting away from France while trying to get nearer to Germany The French Premier, M Chautemps, and the Foreign Minister, M Delbos, came to London shortly after Lord Halifax's return from Berlin and there was a general discussion of the European situation Later, M Delbos halted in Berlin on his way to visit capitals in Eastern Europe, and exchanged views with Baron von Neurath

Here was the real beginning of the effort, continued so long as any hope remained, to reverse the tragic trend in Europe Looking back on it now one realises that the chances of success were always slight But that could not be certainly known beforehand If nothing were done Britain—already rearming on a great scale—would have no convincing reply if charged with neglecting elementary means of maintaining peace It was the British Government, with its immense and world-wide influence and authority, which could best take the initiative

It was a thankless task Germany had alienated sympathy throughout the world and nowhere more than in this country No nation can live to itself alone, and the friends of liberty everywhere regarded Hitler's suppression of all democratic institutions in Germany as a danger to Europe Humanity was outraged by the brutal treatment of political opponents and of leaders of the Churches whose courage and devotion to their duty brought them into trouble with the Nazi Party Worst of all was the persecution of the Jews, with its wholesale confiscations, maltreatment in concentration camps, and exile In lands where liberty is prized all this created an intensely bitter feeling not only against Hitler but against Germany Chamberlain shared this feeling, but it did not move him from his purpose, he felt that the greater the Nazi offences, the greater the need, if it were possible, to turn them from their evil ways

At the end of January, 1938, our Ambassador in Berlin, Sir Nevile Henderson, was called home to receive instructions covering the opening stages of negotiations This was

immediately followed by a sharp rebuff On February 5 Government changes were announced in Berlin, and one of them was the appointment of von Ribbentrop as Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, then German Ambassador in London, had come to be regarded as an enemy of this country On his visits to London during the earlier years of the Nazi Government, he used to gloss over Hitler's offences against humanity as the natural and, indeed, inevitable concomitant of revolution Really, he would say, the Fuehrer was a humane man and a friend of liberty, when his power was established and public order made secure in Germany he would be such a beneficent influence in Europe that we should thank God for Adolf Hitler But as Nazi power increased, Ribbentrop's apologies ceased and we saw his real arrogant self His new appointment clouded the prospect of better relations between his country and ours

It was not till March 3, a month after his return to Berlin, that Sir Nevile Henderson was received by Hitler He told him that the British Government was ready to discuss all outstanding questions These included the demand, of which much had been made in the Berlin press, for the return of Germany's former colonies Hitler said that could wait, at the time the question did not seem to interest him, and the Ambassador never received the written statement about it which the Fuehrer promised

The time for this interview was inauspicious As events soon showed, Hitler's mind was concentrated on Austria and the attitude of the Government there had put him in a very bad temper Sir Nevile Henderson gives this account of the reception of the statement he made on behalf of the British Government

It was perhaps the longest continuous statement which I ever made to Hitler and must have lasted for the best part of ten minutes During that time he remained crouching in his armchair with the most ferocious scowl on his face which my firm but, at the same time, conciliatory remarks scarcely warranted He listened nevertheless till I had finished and then let himself go [Nothing, he said, could be done until the Press campaign against him in England ceased (He never failed to harp on this subject in every conversation which I had

with him) Nor was he going to tolerate the interference of third parties in central Europe Injustice was being done there to millions of Germans, and self-determination and democratic rights must be applied to Germans as well as others Only 15 per cent of the Austrian population supported the Schuschnigg régime, if Britain opposed a just settlement, Germany would have to fight If Germans were oppressed there he must and would intervene and, if he did intervene, he would act like lightning

So long as that mood continued, and it prevailed more or less throughout the summer, the negotiations which the British Government desired were impossible It is a singular fact that although Chamberlain was, over a long period, bitterly attacked for his policy towards Germany he never had the opportunity to give a detailed exposition of it Always, so long as agreement was regarded as possible, preliminary negotiations were expected to, or might, begin shortly, and he could not at that stage tie himself down to publicly stated definite proposals It became known, however, that our Government were prepared to discuss the German demand for the return of former colonies This did not mean a bilateral agreement about colonies The question was ultimately one for consideration with other colony-owning powers Moreover, there would be no colonial nor any other concession to Germany without an adequate *quid pro quo* If the Powers concerned agreed to return a colony which Germany lost in the war of 1914-18, it was Chamberlain's view that militarisation should be prohibited no submarine bases, no air force, no native armies In these as in other matters negotiation with Germany was regarded as part of the preparation for a European settlement

CHAPTER V

Mr. Eden's Resignation

EARLY IN FEBRUARY, 1938, THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR, Count Grandi, informed Mr. Eden that his Government were ready to open discussions, covering all disputes between Italy and Britain. Mussolini had learned of Hitler's designs against Austria, and they frightened him. The maintenance of an independent Austria was still a cardinal interest for Italy. His Abyssinian adventure had separated him from the Powers which shared his views about that and had thrown him into the arms of Hitler, who was determined to bring Austria within the Reich. It was probably too late to prevent this and Mussolini could not afford to quarrel with Germany unless he re-established good relations with old friends. At any rate it was desirable to have some insurance against the risks that would be incurred if the German frontier were established in the Brenner.

That appeared to be the meaning of Grandi's invitation. Chamberlain felt that it ought not to be spurned. Mussolini's mood was one to encourage. It was eminently desirable either to separate him from Hitler or to weaken their partnership. If neither was done, Italy would be more and more dependent on Germany and their alliance would be a constant danger to the peace of the world. There could scarcely be two opinions about that. Mr. Eden shared the Prime Minister's view with one qualification which suddenly and unexpectedly divided the Cabinet.

There were reports in two newspapers on Saturday, February 12, of a Cabinet crisis arising out of differences between the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary. Members of the Cabinet were not aware of any crisis, and neither of the two men immediately concerned appears to have realised then that crisis there would be or that it was so near. Chamberlain told the *Sunday Times* that there was "not a word of truth in the story"; Mr. Eden authorised an unqualified contradiction of it in the *Daily Telegraph*. It was not till the following Friday morning

that the two men reached an issue on which Mr. Eden felt that they might have to part company. Count Grandi had a long talk with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary at 10, Downing Street. He was there again after luncheon, and in the evening notice was given of an emergency meeting of the Cabinet on the Saturday afternoon.

The Prime Minister wished, without further delay, to enter upon the negotiations suggested by the Italian Government. Mr. Eden was in favour of negotiation but not until Italy had withdrawn a substantial number of her troops from Spain. Chamberlain thought he was substantially meeting this view by stipulating that no agreement should take effect till that stage was reached. Mr. Eden, who regarded the point as one of honour for himself, was not persuaded, and said he must resign. His colleagues very much wanted to retain his collaboration and took extraordinary means to secure it. On Saturday afternoon the Cabinet sat for three hours. On Sunday afternoon it met for more than three hours, assembling just as Hitler was ending a long speech in Berlin.¹ In the evening there was a "meeting of Ministers," and another Cabinet meeting later the same night. Mr. Eden's resignation and that of Lord Cranborne, Under-Secretary to the Foreign Office, were then officially announced.

Next day the Italian Ambassador called on the Prime Minister and gave him an assurance (received from Rome on Sunday morning) that the Italian Government accepted the British formula concerning the withdrawal of foreign volunteers from Spain and the grant of belligerent rights. It is plain that earlier receipt of this communication would not have satisfied Mr. Eden. Explaining his position to the House of Commons on the Monday, he said the attitude of the Italian Government to international problems, and to this country in particular, did not justify us in entering on the proposed negotiations. The Prime Minister and his colleagues took another view, and they might be right, but, said Mr. Eden, "If they are right, their chances of

¹ Reporting the events of that exciting afternoon, the B.B.C. noted the arrival in Downing Street of a taxicab, parcels from which were handed in at No. 10. They contained, for members of the Cabinet, copies of a special edition of the *Sunday Times* containing a report of Hitler's speech.

success will certainly be enhanced if their policy is pursued by another Foreign Secretary," one who had complete belief in the methods employed He further said that though it was the difference on Italy which had separated him from his colleagues, that was not the only subject on which they differed "Within the last few weeks, upon one most important decision of foreign policy, which did not concern Italy at all, the difference was fundamental The Prime Minister is, I know, conscious of this Moreover, it has recently become clear to me, and I think to him, that there is between us a real difference of outlook and method "

Mr Eden's speech was followed by the Prime Minister's exposition, fuller than he had given before, of British policy towards Italy Of the events leading up to the Foreign Secretary's resignation, he said

They (the Italians) have informed us of their earnest desire that conversations should start as soon as possible, and it was upon the expression of that desire that the conversation between the Italian Ambassador, the Foreign Secretary, and me took place The Foreign Secretary concurred, but later in the day sent me a note asking me not to commit the Government to anything specific during the conversation As a matter of fact I did abstain from anything of the kind

When the conversation was over the Foreign Secretary and I discussed what were the conclusions that should be drawn from it It was then, as it seemed to me, that for the first time our differences became acute This was on Friday I was convinced that a rebuff to the Italian expression of their desire that conversations should start at once would be taken by them as a confirmation of those suspicions which I have described, suspicions that we had never really been in earnest about the conversations at all

Chamberlain added that the Italian Government would be told at once that we were ready to negotiate He had already impressed on Count Grandi two points

First of all, I told him that the British Government regarded a settlement of the Spanish question as an essential feature of any agreement Secondly, I repeated that, as he had already been told by Mr. Eden, we were loyal members of the

League, and that if we came to an agreement we should desire to obtain the approval of the League for it I said it was essential that it should not be possible, if we went to the League to recommend the approval of the agreement, for it to be said that the situation in Spain during the conversations had been materially altered by Italy, either by sending fresh reinforcements to Franco or by failing to implement the arrangements contemplated by the British formula

After repudiating a suggestion that the terms of an agreement were already cut-and-dried, Chamberlain said

I have never been more completely convinced of the rightness of any course I have had to take than I am to-day of the rightness of the decision to which the Cabinet came yesterday

The peace of Europe must depend upon the attitude of the four major Powers—Germany, Italy, France, and ourselves. For ourselves, we are linked to France by common ideals of democracy, of liberty, and Parliamentary Government. France need not fear that the resignation of my right honourable friend upon this issue signifies any departure from the policy of the closest friendship with France of which he has been such a distinguished exponent. I count myself as firm a friend of France as my right honourable friend. The difference between him and me will never mean that there is any difference between us about our relations with France.

On the other side we find Italy and Germany linked by affinities of outlook and in the forms of their government. The question that we have to think of is this. Are we to allow these two pairs of nations to go on glowering at one another across the frontier, allowing the feeling between the two sides to become more and more embittered until at last the barriers are broken down and the conflict begins which many think would mark the end of civilisation? Or can we bring them to an understanding of one another's aims and objects, and to such discussion as may lead to a final settlement? If we can do that, if we can bring these four nations into friendly discussion, into a settling of their differences, we shall have saved the peace of Europe for a generation.

That did not satisfy the Labour Opposition who violently attacked the Prime Minister, charging him with a degrading complaisance towards the dictators "Whining to Mussolini" and

"surrender to dictatorship" were two of Mr Attlee's phrases "A definite lining up beside the Fascist Powers," said Mr J Griffiths. Next day there was a Labour motion censuring the Government and Mr Arthur Greenwood, who moved it, declared that "the Prime Minister" has sneaked round to the pirates' lair." Mr Eden's resignation had been demanded by the dictators and Mr Greenwood supposed that they would have to be consulted about the appointment of his successor!

Speaking after the Prime Minister, Mr Churchill and Mr Lloyd George both supported Mr Eden in his decision to resign. "I feel personally, as an older man," said Mr Churchill, "the poignancy of his loss because he seems to be the one fresh figure of first magnitude arising out of the generation which was ravaged by the war."

The Government's decision did not involve a change of policy, for negotiation with Italy was resolved on in the previous summer and, but for untoward events, would have begun in September. Italy now, for the second time, suggested discussion, and new policy there would have been if this overture had been rejected. Yet this episode was the beginning of a change which intensified and widened opposition to the Government. Mr Eden's resignation had an importance out of all proportion to the differences with his colleagues that brought it about. From now on the controversy was more embittered. This was in no way fomented or encouraged by Mr Eden himself. He was never factious and his attitude to the Government was always dignified and restrained. But Labour Party spokesmen who, while he was in the Government, had attacked him for not effectively supporting "collective security" now hailed him as a paragon of loyalty to the League, indeed as a martyr in its cause. It is true that Mr Eden had championed the policy of non-intervention in Spain which had done more than anything else to embitter the Opposition against the Government, and he was not the man to recant. But the brand plucked from the burning need not be too closely examined. His past was forgotten and forgiven. He had been badly treated. Chamberlain had interfered with his work at the Foreign Office, sometimes behind his back! Gossip supplied examples of this which usually dissolved on the touch of facts.

Mr Eden made no such complaints. His relations with Chamberlain had always been friendly. Two men of strongly contrasting personalities could not discuss great questions from day to day and have no differences of opinion. But almost to the end—and, indeed, even then—such differences were more about method than purpose. Eden was steeped in the ways of the Foreign Office, and these occasionally irritated Chamberlain. He thought that in that Department there was hostility to himself. Prejudice there may have been, for Baldwin's relations with the Foreign Office had been easier, while his successor's interest in its work was close and continuous, and he rightly wanted to gear the organisation to his crusade for peace. Departments do not like such changes. At times Chamberlain felt that, apart from the Secretary of State, there was in the Foreign Office a sort of passive resistance to his own views, even after decisions had been taken.

The effect of Mr Eden's resignation on opinion outside Parliament was not easy to measure. There was little change in the alignment of the press. Of the London daily newspapers, *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail*, and the *Daily Sketch*, continued to support the Government, while the *News Chronicle* and the *Daily Herald* backed the Opposition—as they had done before. In the provinces there was a change in the *Yorkshire Post* which drew away from the Government and specially supported Mr Eden. The important Kemsley newspapers in Manchester, Sheffield, Cardiff, Newcastle, Middlesbrough, Glasgow, and Aberdeen consistently defended the foreign policy which had become associated with the name of Chamberlain. Public opinion was still predominantly with him.

Negotiations with the Italian Government were begun without delay. It was a favourable moment, for the Germans were overrunning Austria and establishing their frontier on the Brenner. This was gall and wormwood to Mussolini and no doubt contributed to the rapid progress made with the comprehensive new agreement. It was concluded on April 16. But the British Cabinet enforced the condition that it should not take effect till there had been a substantial withdrawal of Italian troops from

Spain Mussolini thought the condition was met when it was announced that 10,000 had been withdrawn, but British Ministers were not satisfied, and the agreement did not come into full operation until November. President Roosevelt noted it as "proof of the value of peaceful negotiation", and so it was, but the delay in giving it effect irritated Mussolini and relations with Italy were difficult.

The agreement covered the interests of the two countries in the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and territories bordering thereon. Provision was made for the periodical exchange of information as to prospective redistribution of naval, military, and air forces in those regions, and each party declared that it would not use propaganda hostile to the other. The Italian Government repudiated any territorial or political aims or privileged economic position "in or with regard to either metropolitan Spain, the Balearic Islands, any of the Spanish possessions overseas or the Spanish zone in Morocco," and declared that they had "no intention whatever of keeping any armed forces in any of the said territories."

Though British opinion was generally favourable, a minority was against the agreement, and when, on May 2, Chamberlain asked the House of Commons to approve it, this was done against a hostile amendment submitted by the Labour Opposition.

CHAPTER VI

Invasion of Austria

TO FILL THE VACANCY AT THE FOREIGN OFFICE, CHAMBERLAIN turned to Viscount Halifax, then Lord President of the Council. It was a choice that, through the acrid controversies of the following year and more, he had no occasion to regret. The objection raised by the Opposition that the Foreign Secretary ought to be in the House of Commons could not be pressed after the Prime Minister's announcement that he himself would answer foreign policy questions there.

Lord Halifax had held with distinction many high offices of State. His character commanded respect everywhere. But would he stand the strain of the Foreign Office at a time when crises were chronic? Fleet Street gossip said he had accepted the post reluctantly and only for a short time. Though this story was unfounded, it persisted, and in the coming months any suggestion of Ministerial changes was at once linked with expectation of Lord Halifax's resignation. In fact, he accepted the Foreign Secretaryship unconditionally, and held it throughout Chamberlain's Premiership and then under Mr Churchill till he went to Washington as Ambassador.

There was no question now of discord between Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. They worked together in the closest sympathy and at every turn of events Lord Halifax's support of his chief never faltered. He had a gruelling time, for the public now had little political interest except in foreign policy and no ear for speeches on the Government side except those of the men who were directing it. It was fortunate that the new Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Mr R A Butler, was both competent and in full agreement with the Government's policy.

At the time of Lord Halifax's appointment, negotiations with Germany were expected to begin at once. How Hitler spurned the olive branch presented to him early in March by Sir Nevile Henderson has already been recorded. Within a week of their meeting the Fuehrer took the first open move in his swift campaign against Austria. News came on February 12 that Dr Schuschnigg, the Austrian Chancellor, had gone to Berchtesgaden to pay a "friendly" visit to the Fuehrer. They were together for many hours. First reports of the result were reassuring; it was said that Hitler had renewed his pledge of respect for the independence of Austria. What he had done was to use the "friendly" visit for the application of third degree methods to the Chancellor. He was insulted, abused, threatened, and presented with a series of demands which included the appointment of Nazi members of the Austrian Government. Failing this and the other concessions demanded, he was told that a German army would march into the country. Some of Hitler's terms Schuschnigg was not in a

position to grant, for they encroached on the powers of the head of the State, President Miklas, but he did accept others and, within a few days, they took effect Dr Seyss-Inquart, a Nazi, became Minister of the Interior, and others sympathetic to the Nazis were admitted to office It was noted as a sinister sign that the day after his appointment Seyss-Inquart went to Berlin There followed disorders which he had the authority to suppress instead he encouraged them

Schuschnigg saw that the independence of his country was being destroyed, he saw also that there was no prospect of help from outside France was distracted by prolonged Ministerial crises M Delbos, Foreign Minister, had declared a few weeks before that Austrian independence was an indispensable factor in European equilibrium, but now France did no more than ask Britain and Italy to join her in a diplomatic *demande* in Berlin The British Government protested with vigour both there and in London, where Ribbentrop, the German Ambassador, was paying a farewell visit, and had to listen to plain words from both Chamberlain and Halifax

The Power most concerned next to Austria herself was Italy In 1931, when a secretly arranged Customs Union between Germany and Austria was announced, Italy was foremost in protest It was a clear violation of the Peace Treaties Moreover, in 1922, Austria had given an undertaking not to make economic or financial engagements which, directly or indirectly, would compromise her independence That independence Italy was resolute to maintain France and Czechoslovakia joined in the protests The British Labour Government was uncertain in its attitude and counselled caution, though the Foreign Secretary did suggest that, as a first step, Germany and Austria should accept a finding of the League as to the legality of the Customs Union Though the Germans were obstinate, Austria agreed, under diplomatic pressure, to await the meeting of the Council of the League in September It was, however, the financial crisis which forced her to surrender, for Germany could not give her the help she must have and France effectively turned the screw Two days after Austria's abandonment of the Customs Union the Permanent Court of International

Justice decided by a narrow majority—eight votes to seven—that it was illegal. The interpretation put upon this was that the minority saw in the Customs Union no danger to Austrian independence. That it was in danger now was seen by all. Italy was about to pay the first big instalment of the price of the Axis.

On Wednesday, March 11, Schuschnigg announced that he would submit the question of the nation's independence to a plebiscite of the Austrian people on the following Sunday. They were to be asked to vote for or against "a free, German, independent, Christian, and united Austria." If the plebiscite could be conducted with ordinary safeguards for the voters, there was no doubt that Austria would decide for independence. They were not to have the chance. The Nazis had long been demanding a plebiscite but that was propaganda; they had no use for it if time were not allowed for German bribery and threats to be effectively organised. Nazi disorders were intensified. On the Friday Germany sent an ultimatum which demanded that the plebiscite should be cancelled.

Schuschnigg temporised; he was ready to vary the formula to be voted on and suggested two questions—*independence with Schuschnigg*, or *independence without Schuschnigg*. Germany rejected this offer, and the rattled Chancellor was then given three hours' notice to abandon the plebiscite if he refused, the German army, now near the frontier, would march in. Schuschnigg yielded. He had already offered his resignation and withdrawn it at the President's request. Now, immediately after his surrender of the plebiscite, came the demand for a wholly Nazi Cabinet with Seyss-Inquart as Prime Minister. Again Schuschnigg yielded in a statement which briefly told the world what had happened and begged Austrians to offer no resistance to the German army.

Though all Hitler's demands had been conceded, the invasion began that night. Schuschnigg, scorning flight, was arrested and thrown into prison. Austria, it was announced, was now a province of Germany. There was a frenzy of persecution of democrats, Catholics, and Jews—most of all Jews, many of them were murdered and many took their own lives in despair.

British protests against the German action were contemptuously dismissed as inadmissible in a letter from von Neurath which Chamberlain read in the House of Commons on March 14, the day after the German entry into Austria. No third Power, Neurath said, had any concern with the relations between Germany and Austria. His account of events was that the German army crossed the frontier only on the request of the newly formed Austrian Government, and in order to re-establish peace and order and prevent bloodshed. "The newly formed Austrian Government" consisted of German puppets, and it was on German instructions that they created the situation for which Hitler and his army were waiting. The pretence that other Powers had no concern with the fate of Austria was entirely unhistoric, and Chamberlain treated it with contempt. For the rest he said:

It seems to us that the methods adopted throughout these events call for the severest condemnation, and have administered a profound shock to all who are interested in the preservation of European peace. It follows that what has passed cannot fail to have prejudiced the hope of His Majesty's Government of removing misunderstandings between nations and promoting international co-operation.

In those words the Prime Minister fairly represented the opinion of the country. Nowhere could be heard any defence of Germany's outrage or any excuse for it. But nowhere was there any demand that Britain should go to war, with or without allies, to undo what had been done.

CHAPTER VII

Czechoslovakia

ON MARCH 13, THE DAY AFTER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION of Austria, an assurance was given by Germany to the Prague Government that she had no aggressive designs against Czechoslovakia. On the request of Lord Halifax, this was

repeated to the British Government "By those assurances, solemnly given and more than once repeated," he said, "we naturally expect the German Government to abide, and if, indeed, they desire to see European peace maintained, as I earnestly hope they do, there is no quarter in which it is more vital that undertakings should be scrupulously respected" It is a measure of the distrust which Hitler's record had already engendered that his promises about Czechoslovakia nowhere inspired confidence Less than a month before, he made a speech in which he claimed the position of protector of ten million Germans in lands adjacent to the Reich This total was understood to comprise six and a half million Austrians, and three and a half million Germans in the Sudeten districts of Czechoslovakia

Events in Austria having made what the Prime Minister described as "a profound disturbance of international confidence," the British Government considered "how best to restore this shaken confidence, how to maintain the rule of law in international affairs, how to seek peaceful solutions to questions that continue to cause anxiety" Of these questions, that of Czechoslovakia was now beginning to receive public attention The British attitude to it was defined by Chamberlain, on March 24, in a House of Commons speech which was a carefully considered statement of the country's liabilities abroad He defined the fundamental basis of British foreign policy as "the maintenance of peace and the establishment of a sense of confidence that peace will, in fact, be maintained" That, he said, must be the aim of any Government in this country But it was not "pacifism" It did not mean, the Prime Minister said, "that nothing would make us fight"

We are bound by certain Treaty obligations which would entail upon us the necessity of fighting if the occasion arose, and I hope no one doubts that we should be prepared, in such event, to fulfil those obligations

Then there are certain vital interests of this country for which, if they were menaced, we should fight—for the defence of British territories and the communications which are vital to our national existence

There are other cases, too, in which we might fight if we were clear that either we must fight or else abandon, once and for all, the hope of averting the destruction of those things which we hold most dear—our liberty and the right to live our lives according to the standards which our national traditions and our national character have prescribed for us

Chamberlain reminded the House of certain definite obligations to particular countries. One was, under the Treaty of Locarno, the defence of France and Belgium against unprovoked aggression, and there were also treaty obligations to Portugal, Iraq, and Egypt.

There remains another case in which we may have to use our arms, a case which is of a more general character but which may have no less significance. It is the case arising under the Covenant of the League of Nations which was accurately defined by the former Foreign Secretary when he said "In addition, our armaments may be used in bringing help to a victim of aggression in any case where in our judgment it would be proper under the provisions of the Covenant to do so."

The case might, for example, include Czechoslovakia. The ex-Foreign Secretary went on to say "I use the word 'may' deliberately since in such an instance there is no automatic obligation to take military action. It is moreover right that this should be so, for nations cannot be expected to incur automatic military obligations save for areas where their vital interests are concerned."

His Majesty's Government stood by that declaration, but it must not be interpreted as meaning that they would in no circumstances intervene as a member of the League for the restoration of peace or the maintenance of international order. And such action as it might be in the power of Great Britain to make would be "determined by His Majesty's Government of the day in accordance with the principles laid down in the Covenant." But there were further questions on the case of Czechoslovakia.

Should we forthwith give an assurance to France that, in the event of her being called upon by reason of German aggression on Czechoslovakia to implement her obligations under the Franco-Czechoslovak Treaty, we would immediately employ

our full military force on her behalf? Or, alternatively, should we at once declare our readiness to take military action in resistance to any forcible interference with the independence and integrity of Czechoslovakia, and invite any other nations which might so desire, to associate themselves with us in such a declaration?

Both questions the Prime Minister answered in the negative

From a consideration of these two alternatives it clearly emerges that under either of them the decision as to whether or not this country should find itself involved in war would be automatically removed from the discretion of His Majesty's Government, and the suggested guarantee would apply irrespective of the circumstances by which it was brought into operation, and over which His Majesty's Government might not have been able to exercise any control. This position is not one that His Majesty's Government could see their way to accept in relation to an area where their vital interests are not concerned in the same degree as they are in the case of France and Belgium, it is certainly not the position that results from the Covenant. For these reasons His Majesty's Government feel themselves unable to give the prior guarantee suggested.

But while plainly stating this decision, I would add this. When peace and war are concerned, legal obligations are not alone concerned and, if war broke out, it would be unlikely to be confined to those who would have assumed such obligations. It would be quite impossible to say where it would end and what Governments might become involved. The inexorable pressure of events might well prove more powerful than formal pronouncements, and in that event it would be well within the bounds of probability that other countries, besides those which were parties to the original dispute, would almost immediately become involved.

This is especially true in the case of two countries like Great Britain and France with long associations of friendships, with interests closely interwoven, devoted to the same ideals of democratic liberty, and determined to uphold them.

One other section of the speech invites quotation

Great Britain has repeatedly borne witness to the principles on which she considers the peace of the world depends. We

do not believe that any stable order can be established unless by some means or other recognition can be secured for certain general principles. The first is that differences between nations should be resolved by peaceful settlement and not by methods of force. The second, admittedly of no less importance, is that a peaceful settlement, to be enduring, must be based on justice.

Holding these views, successive British Governments have accepted the full obligation of the Covenant of the League of Nations, and done their best to discharge them, they have acceded to special instruments designed to pledge the nations afresh to refrain from resort to aggressive war, and they have reinforced the general obligations thus undertaken by specific undertakings within the framework of the League towards countries with whom they enjoy special relations or in which they have special interest.

On the other side, they have constantly lent, and are prepared to continue to lend, their influence to the revision of relations between nations, established by treaty or otherwise, which appeared to demand review. They will continue, whether by way of action through the League or by direct diplomatic effort, to exert all their influence on the side of bringing to peaceful and orderly solutions any issues liable to interrupt friendly relations between nations.

On the question of Czechoslovakia the Prime Minister promised the good offices of the Government.

While Mr Attlee condemned the Prime Minister's speech, Mr Churchill welcomed it as "a very considerable advance on any previous declaration." He was particularly pleased with the reference to France and "our arrangements for mutual defence with the French Republic. Evidently they amount to a defensive alliance." But that being so, he argued, why not declare it in plain words and make it effective by a military convention? Mr Churchill did not believe there was any immediate danger of a major land war about Czechoslovakia and, if there were, he anticipated that France and Russia would go to the aid of the Czechs.

Empire opinion on the Prime Minister's speech was favourable. Abroad it was well received except in Germany where mention of the bare possibility that she might attack Czechoslovakia was

sharply resented France, which had been perturbed by Mr Eden's resignation, was reassured that British policy was unchanged At home it was generally felt that the bases of policy laid down by Chamberlain were such as any responsible Government in this country ought to, and would, declare

As it was Hitler's treatment of the republic of Czechoslovakia that destroyed the British policy of a negotiated settlement with his Government, it is well to understand the position of that country and what it stood for

Though the Republic dates no farther back than the end of the war of 1914-18, the Slav people who were the largest part of its inhabitants—the Czechs of Bohemia and Moravia—possess a highly respectable national pedigree They were an independent kingdom in the union of western Christendom that was called the Holy Roman Empire John Hus, the Bohemian martyr, was a disciple of our own Wycliffe and an apostle of the Reformation a century before Luther The cause for which he died was long upheld by the Czechs In the counter-Reformation of the seventeenth century their Protestantism was suppressed and they became subject to Austria, and so remained until war enabled them in 1918 to re-establish their independence

There had been a remarkable revival of Czech nationalism in the nineteenth century It was fed at the roots of language, history, literature, and music, and when opportunity came the people were ready National independence was proclaimed by Czechs in America, in November, 1915

Czechoslovakia was not the creation of the Versailles Conference The Czech National Council took over the government in Prague at the end of October, 1918, while war was still raging Slovakia declared its independence of Austria-Hungary on October 30, the nationalist leaders had already decided to join the Czechs for the sufficient reason that their country was not strong enough to stand by itself and they were determined to break away from Hungary That was the position also of the Ruthenians

But there were grave doubts about the frontiers as ultimately drawn The population was dangerously mixed In 1918, the Czechs numbered about 7,000,000, rather less than half

the total There were close upon 3,000,000 Slovaks, about 700,000 Hungarians and over half a million Ruthenians In the Bohemian and Moravian border districts there were over 3,000,000 Germans At the Peace Conference, Dr Beneš, who was the first Foreign Minister of the new State, submitted a memorandum in which it was said that the system of proportional representation would be introduced to ensure for the various nationalities their full influence on all elected bodies Further, "the Czechoslovak Government intends to organise its State by taking as the basis of the rights of the nationalities the principles applied in the constitution of the Swiss Republic" This meant the adoption of a cantonal system The forecast was not justified by the event, and even when it was made it did not remove the apprehension of serious racial troubles Would even a close replica of the Swiss model have given security to Czechoslovakia? In the light of events who doubts that when Hitler was ready for the meal the neutral German canton would have been swallowed as greedily as the neutral Austria? But few thought in 1919 that precautions against German aggression were of practical importance The cantonal suggestion was dropped and forgotten Czechoslovakia soon accepted the French offer of alliance

As he has since recorded, Mr Lloyd George had serious misgivings about the incorporation in the new State of "hundreds of thousands of protesting Magyars and millions of angry Germans" The British Labour view at the time was that the Germans in the new State ought to be given a plebiscite One of their leaders, the late Arthur Henderson, said

Millions of Germans are placed under Czechoslovakian, Polish, and Italian rule This will create irredentist populations as considerable as those which provoked the Serbian agitation before the war

Mr Churchill shared these apprehensions He wrote that the Germans within the Czechoslovakian boundaries "hold firmly together like the Ulstermen in Ireland", to exclude them would "deeply and perhaps fatally" weaken the new State, but "to include them was to affront the principle of self-determination"

The new Government at Prague was energetic and efficient

It took over an administration in chaos. But the republic possessed two invaluable assets: its natural and industrial resources were great, and its President, T. G. Masaryk, had a genius for leadership and was entirely trusted by the Czech people. It was he who gave the country its name and planned its democratic constitution with local autonomy for each of the five provinces. The system worked well on the whole, initial difficulties were quickly overcome and the country prospered. Czechoslovakia was one of the well-governed countries of Europe.

After twenty years, disaster came from the German fringe and its exploitation by an outside Power. It was not a new problem. Back in the Middle Ages German traders filtered over the border into Bohemia or Moravia and there remained. Their numbers varied from century to century, and normally they caused no great political trouble. In recent times they were stirred by the modern spirit of nationalism but, so long as they were let alone by the German Nazis, this did not affect their loyalty to the Republic and in the summer of 1938 there were three Germans in the Prague Cabinet.

CHAPTER VIII

The Sudeten Crisis

IT WAS A BLEAK PROSPECT FOR CZECHOSLOVAKIA AFTER Hitler's annexation of Austria. No longer could she rely on her strong defence line against Germany in the north, for it could now be turned by an advance across the Austrian border to the south. Yet the Czechs still presented a brave front to the world. Masaryk had gone, but they trusted his successor, Dr Beneš, to steer them safely through the perils ahead. They had an arbitration treaty with Germany. If that proved to be worthless there were the alliances with France and Russia. They believed that if Germany attacked them their allies would come to the rescue, and they hoped also that, though she had no direct

obligation to them, Britain would be drawn into the war on their side in defence of France

It was not till 1938 that the Germans became aggressive. In the previous year conditions were fairly quiet. Trade between the two countries was improving. Concessions were made to the German minority, and the Prime Minister, Dr Hodža, admitted that in the past they had been ungenerously treated in the allocation of State employment. There were other grievances, and it soon became obvious that the Czech Government ought to have faced the whole question of minorities earlier and boldly instead of doling out small concessions which satisfied nobody and stimulated appetite for more. As the Nazi temper rose, the danger was realised by British and French diplomats in central Europe. Friendly warnings were given to the Prague Government by Sir Samuel Hoare when he was Foreign Secretary, and were renewed by his successor, Mr Eden.

Nazi complaints were grossly exaggerated. Germans were not oppressed, and sweeping charges about ill-treatment of minorities were unjustified. But for outside interference, all substantial grievances could have been peacefully removed. Hitler's hatred of Czechoslovakia was fomented by her alliances with France and Russia, by her prosperity and by the character of her statesmen. Masaryk was a good as well as a great man, and the Fuehrer had no use for goodness. When Masaryk died, in September, 1937, Sudeten Germans praised him for his efforts to establish better relations between the two peoples. But better relations were no part of Hitler's plans. Czechoslovakia was doing well, unemployment was diminishing, foreign trade growing, there was a record output in 1937 of coal and iron. The army was being mechanised and the northern frontier defences strengthened.

Hitler was resentful and greedy. After the speech of February, 1938, in which he claimed a protectorate over ten million Germans in territory adjacent to the Reich, Dr Hodža declared that the Czechs desired a peaceful settlement, but that if they were attacked they would defend their country to the last. A more important statement of Czech policy was made a few days later by Dr. Beneš to Richard Keane, the Diplomatic Correspondent

of the *Sunday Times* (published in the *Sunday Times* on March 8). It was studiously moderate and correct. His reference to the Hitler-Schuschnigg meeting at Berchtesgaden gave no sign of alarm, and he welcomed the prospect of British talks with Germany and Italy.

An understanding between the Great Powers would be most welcome here, and would greatly ease central European difficulties. Any improvement of relations with our neighbours could not fail to lead to beneficial consequences inside this country and generally throughout Europe.

He added that if the Great Powers reached a general settlement which required contributions from all concerned Czechoslovakia would bear her share. The Czechs did not forget their vital interest in good economic—and political—relations with Germany. Dr Beneš claimed that they had done more for the German and other minorities in the State than the treaties required. They would give information about this to their friends, "France and Great Britain in particular." But

Our treatment of the minorities and the relationship between the Government and the German parties here constitute an internal issue which can never be the subject of direct negotiation or discussion with a foreign Power. It would not be a contribution to peace because such an intervention could afterwards be repeated on any occasion.

This firm statement was qualified. Dr Beneš declared (1) that for the fulfilment of the minority treaties they held themselves accountable to the League of Nations, and (2) they recognised the moral right of Europe to take an interest in the minorities as in anything "which can be improved for the peace of Europe."

Dr Beneš did not believe war was imminent. "But we are prepared to defend our democratic ideals—ideals nurtured in Paris, London, Brussels, and Washington—and our territorial integrity by force if necessary." He added

We will, of course, never abandon the western Powers with whom we are linked by a common democracy. We hope they will not abandon us. We are a western country, bound to the evolution of western Europe.

And he reminded all concerned that Czechoslovakia was "financially and economically strong and sound," with military strength and industrial resources "second only to those of the Great Powers" Moreover "our geographical position in Europe is important"

A few days later Germany invaded Austria The promise to respect Czech independence followed shortly after, but it was then also that a rapid crescendo of interference began Konrad Henlein, the Sudeten chief, played up to the Fuehrer's lead, and from now till the autumn there was a succession of crises each worse than the one before Under threats, two of the Germans in the Prague Cabinet resigned their seats in March and joined the Sudeten Party, the third, a Social Democrat, also left the Cabinet, though he continued to support the Government The other minorities—Slovaks, Ruthenians, Hungarians, Poles—began to exploit the situation by demanding concessions for themselves

While continuing their defence measures, the Czechs adopted precautions against "incidents" Throughout the country political demonstrations were prohibited On April 24 Henlein put forward the eight demands of what became known as the Karlsbad Programme

- 1 Full equality of status for Czechs and Germans
- 2 A guarantee of this equality by the recognition of the Sudeten Germans as a legal body incorporate
- 3 Determination and legal recognition of the German areas within the State
- 4 Full self-government for the German areas
- 5 Legal protection for every citizen living outside the area of his own nationality
- 6 Removal of injustices inflicted since 1918, and reparation for damages thereby caused
- 7 Recognition of the principle within the German area, German officials
- 8 Full liberty to profess German nationality and German political philosophy

Those demands were so framed that it was felt to be impossible to accept them at once and unconditionally It would have led to illimitable controversy with men whose real aim, it soon became plain, was not settlement but unsettlement Henceforth

that was characteristic of the Sudeten agitation. Outside the Karlsbad formulæ, Henlein demanded that the Czech Government should tear up the alliances with France and Russia. His purpose was not to persuade but to provoke, not to bridge the gulf between the two sides but to widen it. The Eight Points were not meant to be a basis of discussion; they must all be swallowed. That, at any rate, was what he said in Germany and Czechoslovakia. In London, which he visited in the middle of May, he sounded a milder note. He saw Mr Churchill and others who were unmistakably anti-Hitler, and to them he said the Karlsbad programme was negotiable. That was for British consumption only; he forgot it as soon as this unexplained mission was over.

The first batch of municipal elections was fixed for Sunday, May 22. In the tense state of public feeling "incidents" were expected. Several divisions of German troops were reported to be near the Saxon frontier. The Czechs replied by mobilising the specialist troops of the reserves and one year class. Frontier defences were manned. The British Ambassador in Berlin made inquiries at the Foreign Office there about the reported concentration of German forces. Lord Halifax, who was at Oxford, returned to London, where a serious view was taken of the situation. In the evening, the French Foreign Office issued a statement to the effect that if the Germans crossed the Czech frontier France would at once go to the defence of her ally. The elections passed off quietly and the Germans angrily denied that they had made any preparations for attack. But the reports were still widely believed. Hitler was incensed by newspaper comment that the Germans had been held back by British and French protests and Czech defensive measures. In Berlin, the Czech Minister was told that no attack on Czechoslovakia was imminent, but that unless she changed her policy Germany would go to the rescue of the Sudeten districts. Goebbels said, months afterwards, that Hitler decided on May 28 to "settle the Sudeten problem this year" and began to make his preparations accordingly.

Henlein, it was noted, disappeared during those few exciting days. When he returned, on the Monday (May 23), he saw Dr

Hodža and demanded immediate demobilisation. The Czechs were not intimidated, and a week later decrees were issued that the whole population up to the age of sixty were to undergo military training. At the same time, conciliatory measures were considered by the Cabinet, notably a proposed Nationalities Statute designed to remove minority grievances. On two points the Government was firm: it would not agree to the establishment of a legislative Parliament for the Sudeten areas, nor would it allow the Germans there to have complete control of the police.

Feeling was running high. Day after day, German newspapers gave prominence to reports of frontier "incidents" which were mostly invented or grossly exaggerated. The British and French Governments watched events with growing anxiety and gave their advice both in Prague and in Berlin. The Czechs were urged to beware of "incidents"; the Germans were told that if European peace was to be maintained a settlement in Czechoslovakia was urgently important. Two official British observers arrived in Prague on June 9. Henlein, the day before, had presented demands which embodied the points in the Karlsbad programme put forward in April, and the first of a series of conferences between Czech Ministers and Sudeten leaders was held on June 14. Results were disappointing, in a few weeks there was deadlock.

The British Government then, the French concurring, persuaded Lord Runciman to go to Prague as mediator. The announcement was generally approved. Lord Runciman had long been one of the ablest men in British public life, his calm and judicial temper inspired confidence. Arriving in Prague on August 3, he set himself to win the trust of both sides. There was early complaint that he gave most attention to the Henleinists, but a true reply to this is that they needed most attention. A few days before his arrival the Government had published an outline of the Nationalities Statute. It contained provisions for securing equality in the treatment of all sections of the population, but the Government refused to break up "historic provinces" or to recognise "language frontiers". The Henleinists rejected the proposals even as a basis for

negotiation They also rejected the offer of important administrative posts

Again there was deadlock Lord Runciman suggested that the German districts should have self-government on the Swiss cantonal model, and Mr Ashton-Gwatkin of the British Foreign Office flew to London with the Prague Government's proposals for that The situation was worsening day by day There was gun-running from Germany Henlein publicly advised his followers to "resort to self-defence to put an end to the provocations of Marxist and irresponsible Czech elements" That he had come under the direction of Hitler there was now no doubt So, when Mr Ashton-Gwatkin returned with Lord Halifax's approval of the cantonal plan, Lord Runciman suggested to Henlein that he should submit it to Hitler This he did, seeing the Fuehrer on September 1 and 2 At the same time the plan was communicated to Henlein's colleagues, Kundt and Sebekowsky, by President Beneš It went so far in meeting the German minority's demands that negotiation on it could not decently be refused Besides full regional autonomy, it included a Government loan of 700 million Czech crowns to industries in the German areas But an excuse was soon found for breaking off negotiations even on these liberal terms On September 8, there was a Henleinist demonstration to demand the release of men who had been put in gaol for gun-running and other treasonable acts A mounted policeman, whose bridle was seized by one of the demonstrators, struck him a light blow with a riding whip The Henleinists pretended that this was so outrageous that they could no longer discuss the best reform proposals ever submitted to them

Riots broke out in the Sudeten areas, the atrocity stories in the German newspapers became more sensational, Czech opinion hardened against further concessions On September 10 Beneš broadcast an appeal for peace Two days later, at Nuremberg, Hitler called Beneš a liar, demanded self-determination for the Sudetens and promised them the support of the Reich Worse riots followed in the German border districts and many people were killed Lord Runciman was told by Henleinist leaders that the Karlsbad programme was cancelled and replaced by Hitler's

Nuremberg speech Convinced that his role of mediator was played out, and that the problem was no longer an internal one, he returned to London on September 16. He had come very near to success in a most difficult mission, but he felt now that further negotiation had been made impossible by the Henleinists. Yet the problem remained, more dangerous than ever. Henlein had fled to Germany and was demanding annexation of the Sudeten areas. Hitler's army was ready for action. Before leaving Prague, Lord Runciman advised the Czech Government that the principle of self-determination should be applied to the districts in which Germans were a majority.

CHAPTER IX

France's Unreadiness

THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER OF 1938 IT WAS THE Spanish Civil War that most excited the Parliamentary Opposition and its supporters in the country. Already it was hardening anti-Chamberlain feeling into personal animus. It was not generally understood, on this side of the Channel, that in its dealings with Czechoslovakia the Government was acting in close harmony with the French. Attempts to bring about a settlement were made on our initiative because, having no special treaty obligations and no alliances in central Europe, we could better take the role of mediator. But the French, bound by treaty to defend the Czechs against aggression, encouraged and supported our Government's action, indeed without such support there could have been no Runciman Mission to Prague.

When Parliament adjourned for the long recess at the end of July, the Labour and Liberal Oppositions, thinking mainly of Spain, were still accusing the Government of complaisance to the Dictators. Relations with one of them, it happened, were at that time strained. Mussolini was angry about continual delay in bringing the Anglo-Italian agreement into operation, Chamberlain again told the House of Commons that it would not become

effective until the Italians began to withdraw their "volunteers" from Spain But Hitler was in one of his rare moods of benevolence to Britain On July 19, the King and Queen went on a State visit to Paris, and on the morning of that day the Fuehrer's political A D C, Wiedemann, called on Lord Halifax with a message of goodwill from his master He said Hitler sincerely wished for better relations with this country and believed there were no differences that should separate the two peoples Wiedemann repeated these assurances to Chamberlain and they were confirmed by von Dirksen, the German Ambassador

The pose of friendship was short-lived German military preparations were now on a vast scale Reservists had been called up, second year recruits remained with the colours beyond the time at which they should have returned to their homes, and forced labour was being used to complete defences on the French border As Chamberlain afterwards pointed out, these measures suggested that the Germans were determined on a settlement of the Sudeten question by the autumn On instructions from London, Sir Nevile Henderson told the German Government that their military preparations would be interpreted as a threat to Czechoslovakia, would spread alarm in Europe, and might prevent the resumption of Anglo-German conversations The modification of German military measures was suggested Ribbentrop, in reply, refused to discuss the matter Upon this Sir John Simon, on August 27 at Lanark, repeated the Prime Minister's declaration of March 24 which was, in effect, that if France were involved in war with Germany because she went to the aid of the Czechs, Britain would be on the side of France Sir Nevile Henderson, who returned to Berlin on August 31 after a visit to London, was instructed to give that information to Ribbentrop in a "personal and most urgent message" At Nuremberg, a few days later he was communicating it to all and sundry In his *Failure of a Mission* he says

I had two long conversations with Goering, three with Goebbels, one with Ribbentrop, two or three with Neurath, half a dozen with Weizsacker I conveyed, besides, an endless series of warnings to a host of other Nazi personalities of

scarcely less note, the cumulative effect of which, since talking there was almost the equivalent of broadcasting, I hoped would be useful.

With Hitler at Nuremberg, Henderson "merely exchanged banalities in the midst of my diplomatic colleagues." He felt that if, in the excitement of the great party rally, the warning he had given to others had been addressed to the Fuehrer it would probably have produced one of the brain-storms which left him for a time unapproachable and impervious to reason. But there can be no question that the British Government's position had become known to him.

In one vital respect, it was not plain to our own people. The British Government's declarations were understood and generally approved. They had made no commitment, and admitted no obligation, to go to war to prevent the separation of the Sudeten districts from Czechoslovakia. Yet nearly everyone here understood that if peace-making efforts failed and Germany used force against her neighbour, France would be drawn into the war and Britain would fight by her side.

The Trades Union Congress met at Blackpool in the first week of September and its General Council issued a manifesto. It declared that we were on the brink of war, that the fate of the world was involved in the threat to Czechoslovakia and that the British Government should unite with the French and Russians in resistance to the demands made on the Czech Government. The Labour leaders had not realised that neither French Labour nor the French Government then desired united action on that basis. What the French Socialists and trade unionists thought, or did not think, the British Labourists discovered a week or two later when French representatives of working-class political organisations came to a conference with them in London. The visitors were not fully agreed among themselves but as a body they were not prepared to put pressure on their Government to risk war in order to preserve the integrity of Czechoslovakia. No plan of joint action with the British Labour organisations could be formulated. The French knew they were not ready for war.

The views of the British and French press in the early days of

September presented a striking contrast¹ In this country *The Times* stood almost alone in suggesting (on September 7) settlement by the cession of the Sudeten districts to Germany It is true that on August 27 the weekly *New Statesman*, organ of Socialist intellectuals, had taken much the same line If, it said, settlement in Czechoslovakia could not be reached on the basis of existing boundaries, "the question of frontier revision, difficult though it is, should at once be tackled The strategical value of the Bohemian frontier should not be made the occasion of a world war We should not guarantee the *status quo*" Little notice was taken of this, but *The Times* article provoked a storm and no newspaper of standing supported it Yet many French newspapers favoured the German minority claims and blamed the Czech Government for reluctance to make adequate concessions Neither in the press nor among politicians did differences about Czechoslovakia run on party lines Socialists and trade unionists showed sharply conflicting tendencies No rallying cry came from the Government

France's obligation to defend the Czechs against aggression was written in the treaty and had been repeated in a hundred speeches In public there was no withdrawal from that commitment But the French Government did not meet the German show of force with adequate counter-measures This was the more surprising to those who were unaware of France's unpreparedness for war, because failure to support the Czechs would mean the abandonment of what was left of her European alliances The French newspapers had created, in Paris especially, a state of feeling in which resolute action against German aggression became almost impossible A close observer of French affairs who came to London for a few days at this time spoke of the malaise from which Paris was suffering "People talk there," he said, "as if France has become, or is becoming, a second-class Power It is a real tonic to come to London"

There was certainly no malaise here The threat of war was very disconcerting, for the country's military preparations were notoriously inadequate, but public opinion was steady and

¹ The attitude of the French press to the Czech crisis is described in Chapters XI and XII of *France and Munich*, by Alexander Werth

nobody could say that we had provoked conflict. The Government knew its mind. To a friend who called on him as the crisis was boiling up on Saturday, September 10, Chamberlain warmly repudiated the report in one newspaper of a midnight decision of the Cabinet that if Germany marched against Czechoslovakia Britain would at once be at war on the side of the Czechs. He said there had been no such decision—and no midnight meeting.

"Yet," said the visitor, "if there is war we should be drawn in."

"Yes," the Prime Minister replied, "we should be drawn in, because we could not stand aside if the security of France were imperilled. Hitler must know that our Ambassador has made it plain to all his chief Ministers."

This was at the end of a week during which the outlook had darkened day by day. It was on the following Monday, at Nuremberg, that Hitler demanded self-determination and promised the Sudetens the support of the Reich. The British and French Governments received information immediately afterwards that the German army was ready to strike. At once, there were inquiries from London—what did the French Government propose to do? The reply left no room for doubt. France was not then going to fulfil her treaty obligation to go to the defence of the Czechs. A meeting of the French Cabinet on the Tuesday morning was followed by the announcement that "more reserves may be called up." That was all. The Czechs had already rejected the German demand for cession of the Sudeten areas.

The position was one of the utmost gravity, and it was unforeseen. Little more than three months before, the French Government had publicly declared that they would go to the aid of Czechoslovakia if her territory was invaded by Germany. French Ministers knew that if they were involved in war on that issue full British support would at once be given. Russia, which was pledged to support the Czechs if France did, could not intervene with effect unless her forces were allowed to cross Rumania. If the Czechs resisted attack, Hitler would not be content with the Sudeten areas, his armies would occupy the whole country. Against that, the moral sense of Europe would

revolt France, compromised and unprepared, would feel that honour compelled her to intervene, British public opinion would not be restrained by our own unpreparedness, and we also would be drawn into the war—both Powers unready, while Germany was fully prepared and flushed with victory, for she would have overrun Czechoslovakia before Anglo-French action could have any effect.

That was the situation when Chamberlain decided to address himself personally to the Fuehrer. He communicated his intention to the French Government, of course, and they agreed. Accordingly, on the evening of Wednesday, September 14, he sent the following message to Hitler:

In view of increasingly critical situation, I propose to come over at once to see you with a view to trying to find peaceful solution. I propose to come across by air and am ready to start to-morrow. Please indicate earliest time at which you can see me and suggest place for meeting. Should be grateful for very early reply.

Hitler replied at once that he was ready to meet the Prime Minister, and announcement was made the same evening that Chamberlain would go to Germany on the morrow. It was a departure from the conventions that was universally acclaimed. The welcome given to it was specially warm in the Dominions and America. Mr Mackenzie King, the Prime Minister of Canada, expressed the deep satisfaction with which he and his Cabinet colleagues had heard the news. "I am sure," he said, "the whole Canadian people will warmly approve this far-seeing and truly noble action on the part of Mr Chamberlain. Direct personal contact is the most effective means of clearing away the tension and misunderstandings that have marked the course of events in Europe in recent months. Mr Chamberlain has taken the right step."

French opinion, official and unofficial, supported the Prime Minister's action. M Daladier at once made it clear that his Government approved. Indeed, he claimed some credit for the visit to the Fuehrer, saying that he "took the initiative to establish a personal and direct contact with Mr Chamberlain, with the object of examining with him the possibility of adopting an

exceptional procedure" The Socialist leader, M Blum, was unstinted in admiration "Mr Chamberlain's resolution," he said, "will stir the imagination of the world and that means a great deal In his will for peace, he is showing a noble audacity"

At home the Prime Minister's initiative was approved even by the stoutest critics of his foreign policy His decision, said the Labour Party organ, the *Daily Herald*, had the quality of dramatic intervention which was needed at the moment "It is an effort to stave off a war which has seemed to be growing dreadfully near and, as such, it must win the sympathy of opinion everywhere, irrespective of party It cuts through the normal procedure of diplomacy at a time when something going beyond such methods had become essential"

CHAPTER X

Berchtesgaden

CHAMBERLAIN HAD THREE MEETINGS WITH HITLER within a fortnight—at Berchtesgaden on September 15, at Godesberg on September 22 and 23, at Munich on September 29 Fierce controversy began soon afterwards, but during those fifteen days the sympathy and goodwill of his own people and of the best elements in the population of the civilised world were with him to an extent without parallel Even in Germany the people cheered him wherever he appeared At home, where nobody wanted war, his efforts to avert it were watched from day to day with earnest prayers for his success

He was flying for the first time when he went by air to Munich, on the way to Berchtesgaden on Thursday, September 15 Sir Horace Wilson and Mr W Strang of the Foreign Office were with him At Munich they were met by Sir Neville Henderson They went on by train to Berchtesgaden where, after tea, the Prime Minister conferred with Hitler for three hours Dr Schmidt, the Fuehrer's interpreter was with them, and no one

else Most people had expected that the conference would be resumed next day, and the announcement in the evening that Chamberlain would leave for home the next morning was at first interpreted as an admission of failure It was not so Hitler had raised questions which must be submitted to the Cabinet

The position was worse than the Prime Minister had expected As he afterwards said in the House of Commons

Hitler had made up his mind that the Sudeten Germans must have the right of self-determination and of returning, if they wished, to the Reich If they could not achieve this by their own efforts, he said, he would assist them to do so, and he declared categorically that rather than wait he would be prepared to risk a world war.

At one point (Chamberlain reported) he complained of British threats against him, to which I replied that he must distinguish between a threat and a warning, and that he might have just cause of complaint if I allowed him to think that in no circumstances would this country go to war with Germany when, in fact, there were conditions in which such a contingency might arise So strongly did I get the impression that the Chancellor was contemplating an immediate invasion of Czechoslovakia that I asked him why he had allowed me to travel all that way, since I was evidently wasting my time

Hitler thereupon said that if he could have—"there and then"—an assurance that the British Government accepted the principle of self-determination he would be ready to discuss ways and means of carrying it out, but if no such assurance could be given it was of no use to continue the conversations The Prime Minister then undertook to consult the Cabinet on condition that, meantime, Germany would refrain from active hostilities Hitler gave an assurance to that effect, provided that his hand was not forced by events in Czechoslovakia

After a sixteen-hour day on the Thursday, Chamberlain flew back to London on the Friday and was in conference with some of his colleagues before dinner That day, also, Lord Runciman returned from Prague and there was a preliminary talk with him Later in the evening the Prime Minister reported to the King On Saturday the Cabinet sat for five hours, and deferred formal conclusions till the arrival of the French Premier and Foreign

Minister, M Daladier and M Bonnet, who came to London on the Sunday Their conference was continued till after midnight The communiqué then issued said the two Governments were "in complete agreement as to the policy to be adopted with a view to promoting a peaceful solution of the Czechoslovak question" Further, the hope was expressed that thereafter "it would be possible to consider a more general settlement in the interests of European peace"

These generalities revealed nothing, but it soon leaked out that the demand for self-determination had been conceded This meant the cession to Germany of the border districts in which more than half the population was German

Labour at once began to protest Mr Herbert Morrison, Mr Dalton, and Sir Walter Citrine interviewed the Prime Minister and afterwards reported to the National Council of Labour The Council thereupon issued a manifesto which declared that it had "heard with dismay of the reported proposals for the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia under the brutal threat of force by Nazi Germany, and without prior consultation with the Czech Government" It would be "a shameful betrayal of a peaceful and a democratic people" It was now that the authors of this manifesto learned that the representatives of French Labour and Socialist organisations, whom they had invited to London, were not in agreement with them The feeling on the Opposition side here had been that our Government was pressing the reluctant French to overbear the Czechs and compel concessions

No time was lost in communicating to the Czechoslovak Government the terms of what became known as the Anglo-French Plan Agreed in London on Sunday night, September 18, the proposals were presented in Prague on the following day In view of recent events it was said

We are both convinced that the point has now been reached where the further maintenance within the boundaries of the Czechoslovak State of the districts mainly inhabited by Sudeten Deutsch cannot, in fact, continue any longer without imperilling the interests of Czechoslovakia herself and of European peace In the light of these considerations, both

Governments have been compelled to the conclusion that the maintenance of peace and the safety of Czechoslovakia's vital interests cannot effectively be assured unless these areas are now transferred to the Reich.

The Note went on to suggest that Sudeten districts with over 50 per cent of German inhabitants should be transferred to the Reich without a plebiscite. Such adjustments of frontiers as became necessary should be decided by some international body, including a Czech representative. The transfer of smaller areas based on a higher percentage would not meet the case. If they concurred in these proposals the Czechoslovak Government would be entitled to ask for some assurance of their future security. Recognising this, the British Government, "as a contribution to the pacification of Europe," would be prepared to join in an international guarantee of the new boundaries against unprovoked aggression on condition that such guarantee was accepted in place of existing treaties which involved "reciprocal obligations of a military character."

The Czech Government were not ready to accept such conditions. Instead, they proposed that the whole dispute should go to arbitration. They were entitled to do this, for there was an arbitration treaty between Germany and Czechoslovakia, but they knew it would not be used and in invoking it they were playing desperately for time and position. The British and French Governments also knew that arbitration had no chance. Their Ministers in Prague told President Beneš so and impressed on him the serious consequences of refusal to cede the Sudeten districts.

Cession had been regarded as inevitable by some experienced diplomats in central Europe before the crisis reached its peak. Lord Runciman advised it, first to the Czech Government and then to the British Prime Minister. When he went to Prague he was free to obtain information in his own way and to draw his own conclusions. His report was in the form of a letter to the Prime Minister which is printed fully in the White Paper, *Correspondence Respecting Czechoslovakia* (September, 1938). This report is dated September 21, after the week-end conference of British and French Ministers, but its purport was

known earlier to the Cabinet. It is convenient to give an outline of it here.

When Lord Runciman arrived in Prague, early in August, the constitutional problem was one of the provision of some degree of Home Rule for the Sudeten Germans—the question of self-determination had not arisen in an acute form. Lord Runciman's opinion was that it need not and ought not to have arisen. The basis for negotiations communicated to him on September 6 by the Czech Government "embodied almost all the requirements of the Karlsbad Eight Points, and with a little clarification and extension could have been made to cover them in their entirety. Negotiations should have been resumed at once on this favourable and hopeful basis, but little doubt remains in my mind that the very fact that they were so favourable operated against their chances with the more extreme members of the Sudeten German party." Further, when negotiations had been resumed Lord Runciman was convinced that "incidents were provoked and instigated on the 11th September and, with greater effect, after Herr Hitler's speech on the 12th September." This again stopped the negotiations and the Sudeten leaders presented new and larger demands. These the Czech Government were "prepared to accept on the sole condition that a representative of the party came to Prague to discuss how order should be maintained." Henlein refused this condition and the two sides did not meet again. Thus, as Lord Runciman says in his report:

Responsibility for the final break must, in my opinion, rest upon Herr Henlein and Herr Frank, and upon those of their supporters inside and outside the country who were urging them to extreme and unconstitutional action.

I have much sympathy, however, with the Sudeten case. It is a hard thing to be ruled by an alien race, and I have been left with the impression that Czechoslovak rule in the Sudeten areas for the last twenty years, though not actively oppressive and certainly not "terroristic," has been marked by tactlessness, lack of understanding, petty intolerance and discrimination to a point where the resentment of the German population was inevitably moving in the direction of revolt. The Sudeten Germans felt, too, that in the past they had been given many promises by the Czechoslovak Government, but that little or

no action had followed these promises. This experience had induced an attitude of unveiled mistrust of the leading Czech statesmen. I cannot say how far this mistrust is merited or unmerited, but it certainly exists, with the result that, however conciliatory their statements, they inspire no confidence in the minds of the Sudeten population.

Moreover, the Sudeten Germans were the largest minority in the country they were, indeed, the largest of the many parties in the State Parliament. Yet they could always be out-voted, and this made some of them feel that constitutional action was useless for them. And there were local irritations too many Czech police in the German-speaking districts, Czech firms favoured in the allocation of State contracts, State work and relief for Czechs more readily allowed than for Germans, the encouragement of Czech agriculturists to settle in the middle of German populations.

I believe these complaints to be in the main justified, said Lord Runciman. Even as late as the time of my Mission, I could find no readiness on the part of the Czechoslovak Government to remedy them on anything like an adequate scale. All these, and other grievances, were intensified by the reactions of the economic crisis on the Sudeten industries which form so important a part of the life of the people. Not unnaturally, the Government were blamed for the resulting impoverishment.

For many reasons, therefore, including the above, the feeling among the Sudeten Germans until about three or four years ago was one of hopelessness. But the rise of Nazi Germany gave them new hope. I regard their turning for help towards their kinsmen and their eventual desire to join the Reich, as a natural development in the circumstances.

At the time of my arrival, the more moderate Sudeten leaders still desired a settlement within the frontiers of the Czechoslovak State. They realised what war would mean in the Sudeten area, which would itself be the main battlefield. Both nationally and internationally such a settlement would have been an easier solution than territorial transfer. I did my best to promote it, and up to a point with some success, but even so not without misgiving as to whether, when agreement was reached, it could ever be carried out without giving rise

to a new crop of suspicions, controversies, accusations and counter-accusations I felt that any such arrangements would have been temporary, not lasting

Lord Runciman went on to suggest action to overcome what he believed to be the very real danger of civil war. It had become self-evident to him that "those frontier districts between Czechoslovakia and Germany where the Sudeten population is in an important majority should be given full right of self-determination at once". Any kind of plebiscite would be a formality in such areas, and delay would be dangerous.

I consider, therefore, that these frontier districts should at once be transferred from Czechoslovakia to Germany, and, further, that measures for their peaceful transfer, including the provision of safeguards for the population during the transfer period, should be arranged forthwith by agreement between the two Governments.

In other areas, "where the German majority is not so important," Lord Runciman recommended local autonomy within the frontiers of the Czechoslovak Republic on the lines of the Fourth Plan, modified so as to meet the new conditions brought about by the transfer of the preponderantly German areas.

From this, Lord Runciman passed to "the political side of the problem, which is concerned with the question of the integrity and security of the Czechoslovak Republic. As he saw it, the question was one of removing a centre of intense political friction from the middle of Europe.

For this purpose it is necessary permanently to provide that the Czechoslovak State should live at peace with all her neighbours and that her policy, internal and external, should be directed to that end. Just as it is essential for the international position of Switzerland that her policy should be entirely neutral, so an analogous policy is necessary for Czechoslovakia—not only for her own future existence but for the peace of Europe. In order to achieve this, I recommend

(1) That those parties and persons in Czechoslovakia who have been deliberately encouraging a policy antagonistic to Czechoslovakia's neighbours should be forbidden by the Czechoslovak Government to continue their agitations, and

that, if necessary, legal measures should be taken to bring such agitations to an end

(2) That the Czechoslovak Government should so remodel her foreign relations as to give assurances to her neighbours that she will in no circumstances attack them or enter into any aggressive action against them arising from obligations to other States

(3) That the principal Powers, acting in the interests of the peace of Europe, should give to Czechoslovakia guarantees of assistance in case of unprovoked aggression against her

(4) That a commercial treaty on preferential terms should be negotiated between Germany and Czechoslovakia if this seems advantageous to the economic interests of the two countries

The reader will have noticed that Lord Runciman advised the immediate cession to Germany of those frontier districts in which there was "an important majority" of Germans

Such was the position on the eve of the Prime Minister's second meeting with Hitler. The Fuehrer had demanded acceptance of the principle of self-determination for the Sudeten districts. Lord Runciman had advised it (with qualifications that were soon swept aside). The British and French Cabinets had accepted it. In France, as we have shown, public opinion was predominantly in favour of it—and overwhelmingly against making it a war issue. In Britain sympathy was with the Czechs, and the German threat of force was loathed. But there was no thought of war except in support of France who, it was still believed by the British public, would go to the aid of the Czechs. Our Government now knew better. In the circumstances then existing France would not fight. Chamberlain knew that before he went to Berchtesgaden.

CHAPTER XI

The Godesberg Deadlock

WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THE PRIME MINISTER would pay a second visit to Germany, there was general confidence that peace would be maintained. The Prague Government accepted the Anglo-French plan. But Hitler's natural reaction to this was to put up his terms when Chamberlain met him on Thursday, September 22, at the Rhineland town of Godesberg. The Prime Minister was accompanied by Sir William Malkin of the Foreign Office and Sir Horace Wilson. Sir Nevile Henderson again met them in Germany. Their hotel was separated by the Rhine from Hitler's headquarters.

Chamberlain had expected to resume the discussion at the point on which it was adjourned at Berchtesgaden. Hitler then demanded self-determination for the Sudeten Germans and promised that no provocative action would be taken by him while the question was being submitted to the Cabinet in London. Chamberlain now told him that self-determination had been accepted by Britain and France—and by the Government of Czechoslovakia. Arrangements for making the transfer of territory and for delimiting the final frontier had been worked out. These were explained to Hitler who was also informed of the proposed guarantee against unprovoked aggression on Czechoslovakia. He replied that he would not join in the guarantee unless other Powers, including Italy, did so.

The Prime Minister then asked him whether he would conclude a pact of non-aggression with the new Czechoslovakia. Not while other minorities there were unsatisfied, the Fuehrer replied. The Anglo-French proposed arrangements for the transfer of territory he rejected as dilatory. He insisted on immediate cession, charged the Czechs with oppressing and terrorising the Sudetens, and submitted his own fresh proposals. In these there was at that stage no time-limit, but action was to be swift: the German flag must fly over the Sudeten districts within a few days.

This, as Chamberlain afterwards informed the House of Commons, was a new and totally unexpected situation. At Berchtesgaden he was told that, if the principle of self-determination was accepted, Hitler would discuss with him the ways and means of carrying it out.

He told me afterwards that he never for one moment supposed that I should be able to come back and say that the principle was accepted. I do not want hon. members to think he was deliberately deceiving me—I do not think so for one moment—but I expected that when I got to Godesberg I had only to discuss quietly with him the proposals that I had brought with me, and it was a profound shock to me when I was told at the beginning of the conversation that these proposals were not acceptable, and that they were to be replaced by other proposals of a kind which I had not contemplated at all.

So, his mind "full of foreboding," he withdrew to consider overnight what he should do. First, however, he secured from Hitler an extension of the Berchtesgaden assurance that he would not move his troops while negotiations were pending. On his part, Chamberlain promised to ask the Czech Government to avoid action which might provoke "incidents."

In view of the difficulty of talking through an interpreter, and not sure that what he had said up to then had been completely understood, he sent a letter to Hitler early next morning—Friday. In this he said he was willing to put to the Czech Government the Fuehrer's proposals as to the transfer of territory. He saw no need to hold plebiscites in the bulk of the areas concerned, those whose population was predominantly German. But he saw difficulty in the proposal that such areas should immediately be occupied by German troops.

I recognise the difficulty of conducting a lengthy investigation under existing conditions, and doubtless the plan you propose would, if it were acceptable, provide an immediate easing of the tension. But I do not think you have realised the impossibility of my agreeing to put forward any plan unless I have reason to suppose that it will be considered by public opinion in my country, in France and, indeed, in the world generally, as carrying out the principles already agreed upon.

in an orderly fashion and free from the threat of force I am sure that an attempt to occupy forthwith by German troops areas which will become part of the Reich at once in principle and very shortly afterwards by formal delimitation, would be condemned as an unnecessary display of force

Even if I felt it right to put this proposal to the Czech Government, I am convinced, that they would not regard it as being in the spirit of the arrangement which we and the French Government urged them to accept and which they have accepted. In the event of German troops moving into the areas as you propose, there is no doubt that the Czech Government would have no option but to order their forces to resist, and this would mean the destruction of the basis upon which you and I a week ago agreed to work together, namely, an orderly settlement of this question rather than a settlement by the use of force.

Chamberlain went on to suggest as an alternative to the Fuehrer's plan that, if the Czech Government agreed, the policing of certain areas, pending formal transfer to the Reich, might be done by the Sudeten Germans themselves, or by forces already in existence, possibly acting under neutral supervision. He added "The Czech Government cannot, of course, withdraw their forces, nor can they be expected to withdraw the State police, so long as they are faced with the prospect of forcible invasion."

Hitler's reply was not received till the middle of the afternoon. In temper and substance it was a disagreeable contrast to the Prime Minister's quiet, reasoned statement. It opened with a violent attack on the Czechs. The Germans and people of other nationalities in Czechoslovakia had been tortured, economically destroyed, denied the right of self-determination. The powers of the State had been employed "ruthlessly and barbarically", and "England and France had never made an endeavour to alter this situation". But he—Hitler—had declared to the German Reich on February 22 that Germany would "take the initiative in putting an end to any further oppression of these Germans". He had repeated this at the recent party congress at Nuremberg. In recent weeks the brutality of the Czech Government had become madness, within a few weeks 120,000 Germans had been driven out of the country.

All this was about on a level with the scare reports which German papers had been printing for many weeks. It would not stand examination. But Hitler appeared to be moved to the depths of his being. "This situation," he said, "is unbearable, and will now be terminated by me." Recognition of the principle of self-determination was not enough; he was interested only in its realisation. "I can only emphasise to your Excellency that these Sudeten Germans are not coming back to the German Reich in view of the gracious or benevolent sympathy of other nations, but on the ground of their own will, based on the right of self-determination of the nations, and of the irrevocable decision of the German Reich to give effect to this will."

Hitler claimed credit for fairness in "allowing" plebiscites and revision of frontiers according to the result. The plebiscites might take place under the control either of international commissions or of a mixed German-Czech commission, and German troops would be withdrawn from disputed frontier districts during the plebiscites if the Czechs would also withdraw their forces. But the territory belonged to Germany and could not be left without the protection of the Reich. "No international power or agreement would have the right to take precedence over German right." The Sudeten Germans could not maintain order because they had not been allowed to develop a political organisation that would enable them to do it. The protection of the Reich must be given at once. "Your Excellency assures me that it is now impossible for you to propose such a plan to your own Government. May I assure you for my part that it is impossible for me to justify any other attitude to the German people?"

He mistrusted the Czechs; they had agreed to the transfer of Sudeten Germans to the Reich only in the hope of gaining time. Experience had taught him to assume the insincerity of Czech assurances. Other nationalities in Czechoslovakia could say the same. "In any event, Germany, if—as now appears to be the case—it should find it impossible to have the clear rights of Germans in Czechoslovakia accepted by way of negotiation, is determined to exhaust the other possibilities which then alone remain open to her."

The Prime Minister sent a curt reply to that ill-tempered.

effusion He was still ready, in his capacity as intermediary, to put Hitler's proposals before the Czech Government and, accordingly, asked to be supplied with a memorandum which set them out and a map showing the area to be transferred, subject to the result of the plebiscite Meantime he again asked for an assurance that no action would be taken to prejudice any further mediation that might be possible For the rest

Since the acceptance or refusal of your Excellency's proposal is now a matter for the Czech Government to decide, I do not see that I can perform any further service here, whilst, on the other hand, it has become necessary that I should at once report the present situation to my colleagues and to the French Government I propose, therefore, to return to England

The memorandum asked for by the Prime Minister was not ready There was complete deadlock For some hours it was uncertain whether he would see the Fuehrer again But, at half-past ten that Friday night they began a discussion which lasted several hours and ended with the deadlock unrelieved The memorandum was produced and was seen to provide for Czech evacuation of the Sudeten frontier districts within forty-eight hours This moved Chamberlain to anger and, as he told the House of Commons a few days later, he spoke very frankly

I dwelt with all the emphasis at my command on the risks which would be incurred by insisting on such terms, and on the terrible consequences of a war if war ensued I declared that the language and the manner of the document, which I described as an ultimatum rather than a memorandum, would profoundly shock public opinion in neutral countries, and I bitterly reproached the Chancellor for his failure to respond in any way to the efforts which I had made to secure peace

Hitler's reply to this was that his response took the form of holding up the operations he had planned and giving Czechoslovakia a frontier very different from that he would have taken as the result of military conquests Yet, as Chamberlain naively observed, "this conversation was carried on on more friendly terms than any that had preceded it" Before separating they had a few words together in private and Hitler gave two assurances to the Prime Minister

In the first place he repeated to me with great earnestness what he had already said at Berchtesgaden, namely, that this was the last of his territorial ambitions in Europe, and that he had no wish to include in the Reich people of any other races than the German. In the second place he said again very earnestly that he wanted to be friends with England and that if only this Sudeten question could be got out of the way in peace he would gladly resume conversations. It is true he said "There is one awkward question, the Colonies, but, that is not a matter for war." Alluding to the mobilisation of the Czechoslovakian army which had been announced to us in the middle of our conversations and had given rise to some disturbance, he said about the Colonies, "There will be no mobilisation about that."

That ended the conference of Godesberg and the Prime Minister returned to London next morning. There was still deadlock. The outlook was so grave that before the Godesberg conversations ended the Prague Government were informed that the British and French Governments could no longer take the responsibility of advising them not to mobilise. Equally significant was the stiffening of opinion in France. M Daladier said at a meeting of Radical deputies that if Czechoslovakia were attacked France would at once take measures to help her. The Hodža Government had not survived the crisis but the new Prime Minister, General Syrový, and his Cabinet, had endorsed the acceptance of the Anglo-French plan.

Let us turn to the German memorandum and its map showing the frontier districts north, west, and south of Czechoslovakia which, Hitler insisted, were to be handed over to Germany on October 1. It showed also, mostly deeper in the country, areas in which plebiscites were to be taken in some districts. Final delimitation of frontiers was to be in accordance with the results of the plebiscites.

Czech armed forces, police, gendarmerie, customs officials, and frontier guards were to be evacuated at once from the areas to be occupied by the Germans on October 1. Military, commercial, and traffic establishments, with their equipment and materials, must be left in good order. No foodstuffs, goods, cattle, raw materials, etc., were to be removed. Sudeten Germans

serving in the military forces or the police in Czech territory were to be discharged at once and sent to their homes All political prisoners of German race were to be liberated

The Czech Government at once rejected the German terms This was communicated to Lord Halifax in a moving letter from the Czech Minister in London, Jan Masaryk, on Sunday, September 25, the day after the Prime Minister's return from Godesberg Mr Masaryk recalled that the cession of parts of their country to Germany, as advised by the British and French Governments, was agreed to under the most extreme duress "We had not even time to make any representations about its unworkable features Nevertheless, we accepted it because we understood that it was the end of the demands to be made upon us, and because it followed from the Anglo-French pressure that these two Powers would accept responsibility for our reduced frontiers and would guarantee us their support in the event of their being feloniously attacked "

But now came the new German demand As to this, Mr Masaryk observed

My Government wish me to declare in all solemnity that Herr Hitler's demands in their present form are absolutely and unconditionally unacceptable to my Government Against these new and cruel demands my Government feel bound to make their utmost resistance, and we shall do so, God helping The nation of St Wenceslas, John Hus, and Thomas Masaryk will not be a nation of slaves

We rely upon the two great western democracies, whose wishes we have followed much against our own judgment to stand by us in our hour of trial

Every British heart was touched by this manly letter from the Czech Minister

CHAPTER XII

The Last Chance

AFTER GODESBERG WAR APPEARED TO BE CERTAIN ON the following Sunday, September 25, there were three meetings of the Cabinet, and M Daladier and M Bonnet came from Paris to join in the consultations. Their Government now declared that its treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia would be fulfilled. That would mean war with Germany not only for France but for Britain as well. But French military measures were still far from adequate. The mobilisation ordered was partial, and the force being assembled much smaller than that which the Germans had had under arms for many weeks. The French air force was weak and their production of aircraft very small.

In London the heads of the sea, land, and air forces were preparing for instant action. (There had already been conferences of the British and French military staffs.) The Navy was mobilised. The civil defence organisation was coming into action while Ministers were in council that Sunday. ARP workers in all districts were going from house to house collecting information necessary for the quick issue of gas-masks to the whole population. Hospitals were in process of removal from London. Deep basements were being made ready for use as shelters.

But Chamberlain still refused to admit the defeat of his efforts to save the peace. On the Sunday he told Jan Masaryk that, though he doubted very much whether Hitler could be persuaded to change his purpose, another and last effort might be made to prevent war. He suggested an international conference to be attended by representatives of Germany, Czechoslovakia, and other Powers to consider whether the Anglo-French plan could be brought into operation. Would the Czech Government be prepared to take part in such a new effort? Having communicated with Prague, Mr Masaryk informed Lord Halifax next morning that they were ready to assist the effort to "find a different method of settling the Sudeten German question from that expounded

in Herr Hitler's proposals, keeping in mind the possible reverting to the so-called Anglo-French plan "

On the same day, Monday, Chamberlain again communicated with the Fuehrer. He was to make a speech that night in Berlin and Sir Horace Wilson flew there with a letter from the Prime Minister meant to be read before he went to the meeting. In this letter he informed Hitler of the Czech Government's rejection of the proposals for the evacuation of the Sudeten areas and their immediate occupation by German troops, "these processes to take place before the terms of cession have been negotiated or even discussed." After summarising the Czech objections to the Hitler memorandum as set out in Mr. Masaryk's letter of September 25, Chamberlain went on to say

I learn that the German Ambassador to Paris has issued a communiqué which begins by stating that as a result of our conversations at Godesberg, your Excellency and I are in complete agreement as to the imperative necessity to maintain the peace of Europe. In this spirit I address my present communication to you

In the first place, I would remind your Excellency that, as the Czechoslovakian Government adhere to their acceptance of the proposals for the transfer of the Sudeten-German areas, there can be no question of Germany "finding it impossible to have the clear rights of Germans in Czechoslovakia accepted by way of negotiation." I am quoting the words at the end of your Excellency's letter to me of Friday last

On the contrary, a settlement by negotiation remains possible and, with a clear recollection of the conversations which you and I have had and with an equally clear appreciation of the consequences which must follow the abandonment of negotiation and the substitution of force, I ask your Excellency to agree that representatives of Germany shall meet representatives of the Czechoslovakian Government to discuss immediately the situation by which we are confronted with a view to settling by agreement the way in which the territory is to be handed over. I am convinced that these discussions can be completed in a very short time, and if you and the Czechoslovakian Government desire it, I am willing to arrange for the representation of the British Government at the discussions

Sir Horace Wilson and Sir Nevile Henderson saw Hitler at five o'clock on the Monday afternoon, and he heard the Prime Minister's proposal to resume negotiations. He was in an ugly temper and the British representatives left with little hope that peace would be maintained. In his speech at the Sportpalast that night Hitler said that if the Czechs had not ceded the Sudeten lands by October 1 the Germans would take them by force. After reading a report of the speech, Chamberlain at once issued a statement that the British Government would guarantee the carrying out of the promises made by Czechoslovak Ministers to Britain and France.

At noon next day, Sir Horace Wilson again saw Hitler and found him in the same bad mood. Acting on his instructions, Sir Horace then gave him this message from the Prime Minister: "If, in pursuit of her treaty obligations, France became actively engaged in hostilities against Germany, the United Kingdom would feel obliged to support her." Hitler received the warning with a pose of indifference. "It is Tuesday to-day," he said, "and by next Monday we shall all be at war." But that was not his last word. Sir Horace Wilson took back to Downing Street a letter to Chamberlain in which the Fuehrer tried to persuade him that Czech fears were groundless. Final settlement of the problem of the Sudeten areas would, he argued, be dependent not on unilateral German action, nor on German measures of force, but on a free vote with no outside influence. Details would be referred to a German-Czech commission. Immediate occupation by German military forces was merely a security measure to guarantee a quick and smooth final settlement. But "this security measure is indispensable", without it the Czech Government would drag out negotiations. The contention of the Czechs that their political or economic independence would be crippled was denied. German military measures would be confined within the line marked on the deposited map. In short, Hitler declared it to be "a well-known fact" that "Czechoslovakia, after the cession of the Sudeten German territory would constitute a healthier and more unified economic organism than before."

This letter reached the Prime Minister at half-past ten, and the same night he sent this rejoinder to Hitler:

After reading your letter I feel certain that you can get all essentials without war and without delay. I am ready to come to Berlin myself at once to discuss arrangements for transfer with you and representatives of the Czech Government together with representatives of France and Italy if you desire. I feel convinced that we could reach agreement in a week. However much you distrust the Prague Government's intentions, you cannot doubt the power of the British and French Governments to see that the promises are carried out fairly and fully and forthwith. As you know, I have stated publicly that we are prepared to undertake that they shall be so carried out. I cannot believe that you will take the responsibility of starting a world war which may end civilisation for the sake of a few days' delay in settling this long-standing problem.

On the same night, Tuesday, the Prime Minister made a personal appeal to Mussolini, telling him of the contents of his last message to Hitler and asking him to support the proposal for further negotiation. To this the Duce replied that instructions had already been sent to the Italian Ambassador in Berlin to see Hitler and Ribbentrop at once and to say that, while Italy would fulfil completely her pledges to stand by Germany, he suggested that action be delayed for twenty-four hours so as to allow the Fuehrer to re-examine the situation and try to find a peaceful settlement.

Having done all he could to ward off the threatened catastrophe, Chamberlain broadcast a message to the nation that Tuesday night. In the course of it, he said:

I can well understand the reasons why the Czech Government have felt unable to accept the terms which have been put before them in the German Memorandum. Yet I believe after my talks with Herr Hitler that, if only time were allowed, it ought to be possible for the arrangements for transferring the territory that the Czech Government has agreed to give to Germany to be settled by agreement under conditions which would assure fair treatment to the population concerned.

I am myself a man of peace to the depths of my soul. Armed conflict between nations is a nightmare to me, but if I were convinced that any nation had made up its mind to dominate the world by fear of its force, I should feel that it must be resisted. Under such a domination life for people who believe

in liberty would not be worth living. But war is a fearful thing and we must be very clear before we embark on it that it is really the great issues that are at stake, and that the call to risk everything in their defence, when all the consequences are weighed, is irresistible.

Next morning men and women went to their daily tasks feeling that war had become unavoidable. German aircraft might at any moment be overhead. Many knew of our unpreparedness, of the serious shortages of military equipment, and especially of the inadequacy of the defences against air attack. Yet was there no remotest sign of panic. The nation's pulse was steady. Whatever the handicap, war would be faced with grim resolution.

In the afternoon the Prime Minister reported to a crowded House of Commons. It was the first meeting of the House since July. The international position, as Chamberlain reminded members, was without parallel since 1914. He told the pitiful story of the Czech crisis. In the recital of his activities of the night before, there was a glimmer of hope, but it was very faint. The impression left on all minds was that Hitler was set upon war. Then, just as the speech was ending, came a dramatic change which no one in the House at the time will ever forget. A note from the Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, was brought by a messenger to the Treasury Bench. It was passed to Sir John Simon who handed it to the Prime Minister. There was a short pause while Chamberlain read it. He had just been speaking of Mussolini's intervention, and there was no break in the rhythm of the speech as he went on.

That is not all. I have something further to say to the House yet. I have now been informed by Herr Hitler that he invites me to meet him at Munich to-morrow morning. He has also invited Signor Mussolini and M. Daladier. Signor Mussolini has accepted and I have no doubt M. Daladier will also accept. I need not say what my answer will be. (An hon. member "Thank God for the Prime Minister!") We are all patriots and there can be no honourable member of this House who did not feel his heart leap that the crisis has been once more postponed to give us once more an opportunity to try what reason and goodwill and discussion will do to settle a problem which is already within sight of settlement. I am sure that the House

will be ready to release me now to go and see what I can make of this last effort

This announcement was an indescribable relief to the painfully strained feeling of the House. For the moment, all differences were forgotten. Members knew that the Prime Minister's ceaseless endeavours had for the second time prevented or delayed a terrible war, and they turned to him with profound gratitude. Sir Archibald Sinclair, Mr Attlee, and Mr Maxton wished success for his further effort to preserve peace. The warmest note was struck by the veteran pacifist, George Lansbury, who wished him God-speed and said millions were grateful to him for the initiative he had taken. There was one dissentient voice, that of Mr Gallacher, the Communist member, who put the blame for the crisis on the Government, and declared that if peace was maintained the credit would not be theirs. Mr Gallacher stood alone. In these tense moments the House was in as complete agreement as it could be short of absolute unanimity. Throughout the country news of the blessed respite was received with joy.

CHAPTER XIII

Munich

NO OTHER INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE IN THIS generation has made such a great stir in the world as that at Munich on Thursday, September 29, 1938. In one respect, it has been given a false character. The mutilation of Czechoslovakia did not originate with the council of four which met in the Nazi Brown House. That had already been decided. It was, under pressure, accepted by the Czech Government before Chamberlain met the Fuehrer at Godesberg. A new situation was created by the extremely harsh terms of the transfer of territory which Hitler then laid down. The Prague Government refused to accept them. The French Cabinet was stung into the public declaration that France would go to the aid of the Czechs. M Litvinoff, the chief Russian delegate to the League of Nations,

had said at Geneva that in that event the Soviet Government would intervene Britain also would be involved in the war which, it was now feared, would start in a few days

What the Munich Conference did was to extort from Hitler the withdrawal or modification of the most offensive and provocative of the new conditions upon which he had insisted at Godesberg. By that narrow margin it was that the world got a year's respite from war.

It was said at the time that Mussolini, not ready for a European conflict, was a restraining influence. Hitler may also have given more than a passing thought to the United States of America. Twice that week President Roosevelt had urged him to divert the course of events in the direction of peace. In his second message he said his Government had no political involvements in Europe and would assume none in the present negotiations. "Yet," he added, "in our own right we recognise our responsibilities as part of a world of neighbours. Conscience and the impelling desire of the people of my country demand that the voice of their Government be raised again and yet again to avert and avoid war." Reading this, Hitler could not forget American intervention in 1917.

The members of the Conference were the two Dictators, Hitler and Mussolini, and the two Prime Ministers, Chamberlain and Daladier. Why was Czechoslovakia not represented? And Russia which had a treaty obligation to make common cause with France if she went to war for the Czechs? Both to Hitler and to the Czech Minister in London, Chamberlain had proposed a meeting at which the Prague Government would be represented. There is no reason to suppose that Hitler would have agreed to this had it been pressed upon him again on the Wednesday evening, and the German army's zero hour was then so near that there was no time to argue about it. The two Prime Ministers would have forfeited the sympathy of their own people if, on an issue so tremendous, they had refused to go to Munich because Czech and Russian representatives would not be at the Conference table.

Though time and place were not fixed till the previous evening, the conference began in the Brown House about noon on Thursday. There were then two sets of proposals (i) Hitler's

Godesberg memorandum which the British and the French (and the Czechs) would not accept, and the Anglo-French plan, which Hitler rejected Mussolini presented another document Discussion so based led to these modifications of the Godesberg terms

(1) Hitler had demanded that evacuation of the Sudeten areas should be completed on October 1. The Munich decision was that it should be carried out in five stages between October 1 and October 10. The territory to be transferred on the first four days was now confined to zones which were very largely German in population. The new time-limit was an important gain, as the original demand for a one-day evacuation would have involved cruel hardship.

(2) Hitler's demand at Godesberg was for occupation by German troops up to a line marked on the map then produced. Instead of this, Munich agreed that an international commission should define the limits of the Sudeten areas to be occupied after the first four days.

(3) The international commission, and not Germany, was to define the plebiscite areas.

(4) The plebiscite areas were to be occupied, not by German troops, but by an international force.

(5) Hitler withdrew entirely his demand that, in their evacuation, the Czechs should take with them no goods, no cattle, no raw materials, and no foodstuffs.

(6) Detailed arrangements for the evacuation were to be made by the international commission, instead of by Germans and Czechs.

(7) The release of Germans from the Czech Army and of German political prisoners in Czechoslovakia was to be spread over four weeks instead of being completed in one day.

(8) A right of option into and out of the transferred territories might be exercised within six months from the date of the agreement.

A note to the Agreement stated that the British and French Governments had entered into it "on the basis that they stand by the offer contained in paragraph 6 of the Anglo-French proposals of the 19th September relating to an international guarantee of the new boundaries of the Czechoslovak State against unprovoked aggression. When the question of the Polish and

Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia has been settled, Germany and Italy, for their part, will give a guarantee to Czechoslovakia." There was also a declaration that if the problem of the minorities were not settled within three months the Conference would meet again. Except in that contingency, no further meeting was contemplated, and it was agreed that all questions arising out of the transfer of territory defined in the Agreement should be dealt with by the international commission.

The Czechoslovak Government at once accepted the amended proposals for transfer of territory to Germany. Though the Agreement was not signed till after midnight, provisional decisions were reached during the evening. The news that war had been averted was flashed round the world and everywhere hailed with joy. It is true that in many hearts this was mingled with sadness. The late editions of the evening papers that night stressed, not the easing of Hitler's intolerable conditions, but the mutilation of a country which had our warmest sympathies. For a week we had lived under the shadow of imminent war. After previous disappointments we saw no reason to expect agreement at Munich. Hearts were steeled for the war that still appeared to be probable. And now, at any rate for a time, the peace was saved. No one in this country who had closely followed events during the summer and autumn could share in the universal rejoicing without profound sympathy for the Czech people. They were about to suffer a cruel deprivation. Compliance with the demands of Germany, and the lesser demands of Poland and Hungary, would sorely maim their country. But the alternative was its destruction. If war came there was no prospect of effective aid reaching Czechoslovakia before it was overrun and conquered. From that direst calamity, Munich had delivered the Czechs—for the time.

But Munich had not said its last word. Next morning the Fuehrer and Chamberlain met again and had a conversation which resulted in the signing of this declaration (written by the Prime Minister).

We, the German Fuehrer and Chancellor, and the Prime Minister, have had a further meeting to-day and are agreed in recognising that the question of Anglo-German relations is of the first importance for the two countries and for Europe.

We regard the agreement signed last night, and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, as symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again.

We are resolved that the method of consultation shall be the method adopted to deal with any other questions that may concern our two countries, and we are determined to continue our efforts to remove possible sources of difference and thus to contribute to assure the peace of Europe.

The Fuehrer never made any effort to honour this agreement. It had no effect except—and this became important—as part of the evidence on which the world soon formed its opinion of Herr Hitler. The British Prime Minister had no reason to regret his own signature or the talk that led up to it.

Public opinion of the part he had played throughout these critical weeks was tumultuously expressed when he returned to London. There were vast crowds of cheering people in Downing Street and Whitehall and in front of Buckingham Palace, where he and Mrs. Chamberlain appeared on the balcony with the King and Queen. From all classes and sections of the people at home, throughout the Empire and in other lands, messages of thanks and congratulations poured in. When, a few days later, hostile political comment was heard at Westminster and in some newspapers, it was quickly noted that the Governments of the Dominions whole-heartedly approved the Prime Minister's leadership. From Mr Mackenzie King, the Canadian Premier, came a message in which, for himself and his colleagues, he expressed "unbounded admiration of the service you have rendered mankind." Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and every colony joined in the chorus of praise.

At Johannesburg, during the week-end, General Smuts paid eloquent tribute to the Prime Minister. "Once more," he said, "the occasion has produced the man. A great champion has appeared in the lists—God bless him! The part of the peacemaker was difficult and dangerous, but he gave no thought for himself or his future. He risked all, and I trust he has won all. We are proud of his achievement. We are proud also that, through him, Great Britain, the senior partner of our great Commonwealth of Nations, which appeared in recent years not

to be pulling its weight in world affairs, has once more assumed the moral leadership in Europe. This is perhaps the most significant thing that has happened, and the greatest victory for peace that has been scored."

CHAPTER XIV

The Judgment of the Press

THE LEADING ARTICLES IN THE PRINCIPAL NEWSPAPERS of the country in the few days after the Munich Conference were a remarkable demonstration of public opinion. In this chapter are given extracts from over fifty of them—all the London morning and evening papers, twenty-six provincial morning papers, and fifteen Sunday papers. The provincial evenings are too numerous for all of them to be quoted here and it would be invidious to quote some and not others.

Details of the Munich settlement were received in newspaper offices on the night of Thursday, September 29. In many journals there was comment on the following morning, and they returned to the subject on the Saturday, after a clear day for consideration of the terms. Except where otherwise stated, the daily paper opinions given here were published on Saturday, October 1, the Sunday papers quoted were issued on October 2.

It will be seen that these representative journals were all but unanimous in their expression of the warmest gratitude to the Government, and especially to the Prime Minister, for the maintenance of peace. In not one of them was it suggested that in the discussion with Germany about Czechoslovakia any issues were raised which justified war. In some stress was laid on the high price paid for peace and the sacrifices imposed on the Czechs, but even in the journals of the Left there was (with one exception) no anticipation of the sweeping attacks on the Government which developed in the bitter party warfare that followed. There was every reason to believe that the judgments on Munich from which we now quote faithfully represented public opinion.

LONDON MORNING PAPERS

The Times

No conqueror returning from a victory on the battlefield has come home adorned with nobler laurels than Mr Chamberlain from Munich yesterday, and King and people alike have shown by the manner of their reception their sense of his achievement.

Had the Government of the United Kingdom been in less resolute hands, it is as certain as it can be that war, incalculable in its range, would have broken out against the wishes of every people concerned. The horror of such a catastrophe was not least in Germany. So much is clear from the immense popular enthusiasm with which Mr Chamberlain was greeted on each of his three visits, a crowd of that disciplined nation does not break through a police cordon to acclaim a foreign statesman out of conventional politeness. Indeed, these visits seem to have increased the Fuehrer's understanding of his own people's sentiments, with a definite effect upon his policy.

Let us hope that he may go on to see the wisdom of allowing them at all times to know the sentiments of other peoples instead of imposing between them a smoke-screen of ignorance and propaganda. For our own nation it remains to show our gratitude to Mr Chamberlain, chiefly by learning the lessons taught by the great dangers through which we have been so finely led—that only a people prepared to face the worst can, through their leaders, cause peace to prevail in a crisis, but that the threat of ruin to civilisation will recur unless injustices are faced and removed in quiet times, instead of being left to fester until it is too late for remedy.

Daily Telegraph

Before we take stock of all that has befallen, it may become us to acknowledge the enormous debt we owe to the lofty and indefatigable endeavour of a single man. Never for a moment has Mr Chamberlain spared himself in the pursuit of his mission for peace. He stood on no ceremony, he never lost his courage, or faltered in his resource even at the darkest hour, and it is already a matter of history that war would have been loosed upon

us but for the dramatic initiative of his flight to Berchtesgaden No one can deny him the honours of a noble battle nobly won Now that peace is assured we are bound to ask, what sort of peace? That a price has to be paid for it is clear Is it too high a price?

Daily Sketch

The plaudits of the people for the peace-making Premier still echo in our ears The moving spectacle of his triumphal drives through the cheering crowds who lined the way from the aerodrome to Buckingham Palace is still before our eyes The crowds had joyfully waited in the rain What mattered the temporary rain? Had he not hastened their escape from "the windy storm and the tempest" of war?

The Premier has said from the very beginning that his aim was "the general appeasement of Europe" That task he undertook in the midst of the most bitter and provocative quarrel Europe has known since the war Only a man of supreme courage would have so girded on his armour of faith and gone forth, only a man of fine-steel calibre and honesty could have plucked success from the smoking cauldrons

Daily Express, September 30

Through the black days, this newspaper clung to belief that peace would prevail, and common sense would triumph Over and over again we said it "There will be no European war involving Britain this year, or next year either" Now in the moment when our persistent faith is justified, it is no time to estimate who has emerged the victor from the long controversy Peace is a victory for all mankind

If we must have a victor, let us choose Chamberlain For the Prime Minister's conquests are mighty and enduring—millions of happy homes and hearts relieved of their burden To him the laurels!

News Chronicle

Mr Chamberlain returned to London last night amid scenes of immense enthusiasm The face of war had come so deathly

near by the middle of this week that the people could already feel the breath of its nostrils There is none, whatever his principles, but feels an intense relief at its retreat, and yesterday's scenes were a mark of gratitude For all that, we may already begin to ask what is the price we have had to pay That price is the sacrifice of a small and noble people, a people that have borne themselves throughout the crisis with a courage, a nerve, a restraint which have been an example to all democracies That is not a comforting reflection for the British nation, and when we throw up our hats in rejoicing for the continuance of peace it should have a sobering effect

Daily Mail

The rejoicing in Britain, as in other countries, at the Prime Minister's return with peace as the summit of his valiant endeavours springs from deep gratitude and immeasurable relief In three days Mr Chamberlain has thrust aside the dread menace of war He has done more—much more He has laid the foundations of lasting peace in Europe Yesterday he and Herr Hitler signed an agreement in which each expressed "the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again" Here is the basis for a permanent Anglo-German understanding, the keynote of European conciliation for which Mr Chamberlain has never ceased to work

Daily Herald

The mobilisation of the British Navy convinced Herr Hitler at the last moment of what he had not really been convinced before that Britain would fight if he invaded Czechoslovakia by force At the same time he was made aware of the overwhelming feeling of the German people against such a war He chose to negotiate, and the Four-Power Plan is the result It has been accepted by the Czechs who, friendless and deserted as they now feel themselves, had in fact no option but to accept They have carried themselves throughout with unexampled courage and control They have held to every pledge they have given Would we could say that of the two great democracies upon whose assurances they relied

Summing up, we must say that this plan is open to grave criticism on a number of important points. Nevertheless Herr Hitler has had to abandon the most brutal of his Godesberg terms. For the first time he has had to realise that there are forces in the world more powerful than the absolute will of a dictator.

Daily Mirror

At least let us be grateful that this week-end there is time to think—that prudent thought is not abolished by feverish preparation for the lightning stroke.

LONDON EVENING PAPERS

Evening Standard, September 30

The Prime Minister brings home from Munich one great immediate boon. Britain will not be involved in a European war. For the preservation of peace which he has secured for the people of this country let Mr Chamberlain be praised without stint. It is his due and will be paid in full measure. Peace has been maintained. Terms have been agreed. In all countries their nature will be examined.

Criticism will be directed against the British and French Governments for failing to secure better terms. The unanswerable argument in their favour is that this agreement is better than the irreparable catastrophe of war. Even so, M Daladier's political position in France may be difficult. His reply to critics must be that the lesson for France is that she needs greatly to strengthen her air force and her preparedness. From Britain's standpoint there is only one feature in the agreement which will cause regret—the guarantee of Czechoslovakia's revised frontiers to which we are committed.

Evening News, September 30

In the small hours of this morning there was signed at Munich, between the representative leaders of Britain, France, Germany, and Italy, the agreement which puts an end to the European crisis in its present form. Millions all over the world have heard that news with profound relief and thankfulness. Mr Chamberlain,

to whose unremitting and dauntless work the signing of this agreement is directly owed, has now, in peace, a far greater triumph than any victories in war could bestow. He is hailed all over the world as the man who sought peace and attained it.

The Star, September 30

The peace which has been made this week-end, so different from what it might have been, has come as a boon that most of us are content to enjoy with gratitude. It has saved Europe from the bloodshed of war and revolution, and in this sense even the Czechs have cause for relief.

The bill has still to be sent in and met. The matters which have now been settled without war and are to be the subject of consultation instead of war between this country and Germany have led to the expenditure of millions on armaments. The recent weeks of crisis in this country have involved an expenditure of public and private funds of which we shall never have an accounting. We may well be grateful for the outcome, but we are entitled to resent the expensive and unreasonable process.

SUNDAY PAPERS

Sunday Times

Europe has lived through a memorable week. Nothing quite like it ever happened before. Too many tragic experiences had taught us that when a conflict between Great Powers reached certain stages of ultimatum and mobilisation, nothing could arrest the momentum of war. The Godesberg ultimatum brought those stages, and yet peace has been respite. Five great nations (and many lesser ones) stood on the brink of an abyss in which the horrors of 1914-18 threatened not merely to repeat but to multiply themselves. To-day they find their lives and homes once more their own. They are like men awakening from a nightmare. The sense of relief is boundless.

To whom do we owe our release? Many have co-operated, but the true instinct of all peoples, including the Germans, has recognised the unique credit due to one man, Mr Chamberlain. But for his single-handed and decisive role, peace must have founded.

The Observer

He [Mr Chamberlain] extends his purview beyond Czechoslovakia. He seeks to redeem by other means the soul and objects of the League. He aspires to a constructive policy for ensuring the peace of a generation. Mr Chamberlain is incalculably strengthened for the further tasks, domestic and international, which are as great as those to which any man was ever called. And whatever else may come it will be his abiding fame that for one magical moment, in an age that threatened to become one wide anarchy of hate and death and woe, he restored the touch of nature which makes the whole world kin.

Sunday Express

No. We were not prepared. But if we learn the lesson, if we are resolute in repairing the gaps in our defences, if we labour to multiply the fruits of our soil, if we now and here decide to undertake no commitments and to make no pledges without the approval of the Dominions, then it can be said that out of evil will come good.

Sunday Chronicle

Last week we were given our gas masks war seemed imminent. To-day those gas masks belong almost to a world remote and hideous through which we have travelled to a profoundly happier land. How has the miracle been wrought? In the main, by the unswerving determination, resource, courage, and faith in peace of the Prime Minister. The world to-day honours him. The *Sunday Chronicle* does not pretend that all Europe's problems are now ended they are not. Let us not imagine, either, that there is no work remaining to be done, no danger to be avoided, no clouds that may again gather. There may be many. But Mr Chamberlain has made a beginning.

Sunday Dispatch

The heart of a mighty Empire goes out in pacans of praise to the man who stopped Armageddon. The gratitude of millions of mothers, wives, sweethearts pours out to feed a flood which will sweep Mr Neville Chamberlain to a high pinnacle in history.

We pray that at Munich we have seen the dawn of a new era—an era of peace, of calm reason, and of goodwill among the nations A strong Britain will bring the era closer

Sunday Graphic

Hitler has scored another diplomatic triumph. Now comes the question whether he is big enough to put away the method which has served him so well—the deliberate stirring up of hatred by a controlled Press and Radio. No matter how well that system has worked, he must realise that it is unworthy of a great nation like Germany. Can the Nazi philosophy substitute magnanimity for hatred? On the reply to that question depends the position of Germany twelve months hence.

Reynolds News

Mr Chamberlain went to Munich charged by the British public with a great and human mission to silence “the shout before the avalanche” of war. In that task, which he shared with M Daladier, the Premier was fortified by world opinion. The declared determination of Great Britain, France, and Russia, that German aggression against Czecho-Slovakia would not go unchallenged, had given Hitler pause. President Roosevelt’s fearless pronouncements had buttressed the power of peace. Mr Chamberlain was supported by the strength, provided he showed the will, to flood the world’s mind with the relief of real respite, to free its heart from the shame of betrayal. Honesty compels the comment that he did neither. He did not silence the shout. He only deflected the avalanche. It will fall with crushing cruelty upon the Czechs.

News of the World

From the Four-Power Conference at Munich, upon which beat the fierce limelight of a world’s anxieties, the Prime Minister has returned with peace, peace with honour. From first to last he has displayed a courage, a firmness, a gift of leadership, and a clear conviction of essential things that must for ever remain an inspiration to men of his race, in defence of what he believed to be best for his country and for civilisation he risked his political

life From an ordeal of fire he has emerged triumphantly, the hero not only of his own kindred but of men and women of goodwill in every land throughout the world

The People

For the moment, let us consider soberly what the Premier has already done First of all, whether you like his bargain or don't like it, he has saved us from war Secondly, he has won the support of all the free peoples of the world, including, and most particularly including, all the kindred peoples of our own Commonwealth of Nations It can hardly be doubted that Mr Chamberlain's passionate desire for peace influenced President Roosevelt to support him in his efforts, even against the isolationist policy of a strong American minority Roosevelt, in his final message directed to Herr Hitler alone, practically committed the United States to our cause

Sunday Pictorial

For the last few weeks we have walked in the Valley of the Shadow And we have been unafraid We have looked squarely in the face of evil And we have seen it vanish We have been calm when panic called We have been united in the face of danger We have stood shoulder to shoulder like a phalanx And we have come through the ordeal with dignity and added courage

Empire News (Manchester)

Mr Chamberlain is not likely to be content with his achievement of this week, even though it has evoked the amazement and gratitude of the whole world It is very clear that ever since his advent to the Premiership he has set himself the laudable task of substituting the process of arbitration for the arbitrament of the sword He has perceptibly added to the lustre of the name of his famous sire

Sunday Mail (Glasgow)

On Friday, newspaper posters announced that agreement on the "Peace Terms" had been reached These two words sum up the position The negotiations must be regarded as a peace

conference held before, instead of after, a war. We must recognise however, that the Munich agreement is only a beginning. The solution of the Czech dispute is not enough. It may prove in the Prime Minister's words to be "only a prelude to a larger settlement." We have before us what may well be the final opportunity of laying the foundations of a lasting peace.

Sunday Mercury (Birmingham)

Twenty years of accumulating bitterness and rivalry, of diplomatic bargaining, of increasing fear, have been cut through and dispelled within a few hours. Something was achieved at Munich that made the whole of the civilised world grow close together in sympathy and understanding. No wonder, then, that the peoples of the old and new worlds, from end to end and from corner to corner, are acclaiming Mr Chamberlain for bringing about this miracle.

Sunday Sun (Newcastle)

Europe might have been at war to-day. Only the courage, sagacity, and strength of purpose of Mr Neville Chamberlain saved it from a relapse into barbarism. The crisis—grave and sinister as it has been—will have been worth while if it marks the birth of a new understanding among the leaders of Europe.

Sunday Post (Glasgow)

Providence has always provided us with the man for the emergency. Never has Providence been so kind as when she placed Neville Chamberlain at our head.

PROVINCIAL MORNING PAPERS

Manchester Guardian

The pacifiers of Munich returned home yesterday to receive greater gratitude than has ever been given to any returning conqueror. They have done something that has hardly ever happened before in history—the snatching of the world at the eleventh hour from a universal calamity, from a return to barbarism, from untold cruelty and misery. . . Great as are the

injustices that Czechoslovakia suffers under the Munich agreement, and they are for her calamitous, they cannot be measured against the horrors that might have extinguished not only Czechoslovakia, but the whole of Western civilisation. The Czechs will hardly appreciate Mr Chamberlain's phrase that it is "peace with honour." Politically, Czechoslovakia is rendered helpless with all that it means to the balance of forces in Eastern Europe, and Hitler will be able to advance again, when he chooses, with greatly increased force.

Daily Dispatch (Manchester)

Yesterday Mr Neville Chamberlain returned to be greeted in a manner almost unprecedented. From the King to the lowliest commoner, praise and thanksgiving were showered upon him. They were his meed. Nobly has he earned them. Worthy is he of all the honours a grateful nation may bestow on him. Yet, if we know the Premier aright, he will not allow all this to move him one hair's breadth from the line he has set himself to follow.

Yorkshire Post

The welcome given to Mr Chamberlain on his return to England yesterday, and the world-wide tributes to him, represent a well-deserved acknowledgment of the personal courage, the energy and the perseverance which he has displayed in his great and successful effort to save Europe, and probably in the long run many non-European countries as well, from a devastating war which immediately threatened.

The Munich procedure, though it is called peaceful, is so harsh as to be horrifying. Mr Chamberlain, if his hands had not been tied, would certainly have insisted on less barbaric surgery. We yielded to a remorseless will and an iron discipline which we had not prepared ourselves to confront. There is no political party in Great Britain—and we venture to add none in France—which does not share the blame for this unreadiness. We have yet to fathom all the consequences.

Leeds Mercury

We believe that the people of this country are earnestly set

upon this honourable settlement with Germany [the agreement signed by Hitler and the Prime Minister] being accomplished They are deeply resolved that, if at all possible, a new spirit shall be infused into European negotiations and a bold attempt made to give peace that opportunity to prosper which was denied it by some of the unhappy dictates of the Versailles Treaty They are prepared for a generous settlement with Germany if that settlement can bring assurance of lasting peace

Birmingham Daily Post

Because events have moved swiftly, it is imperative that we should keep our heads, show a restraint when things seem to be going incredibly well comparable with our resolution when things seemed to be going desperately ill Mr Chamberlain has brought from Munich a good deal more than many of his firmest friends and least critical supporters expected He has brought back not only relief from the fear of war, which is a great thing, but also a much greater thing—the prospect of real, abiding peace It sounds almost too good to be true

Birmingham Daily Gazette

Birmingham is proud that the peace of Europe, when all but lost, has been saved by a cool-brained and determined Birmingham man Now, in his seventieth year, through an heroic feat of statesmanship against seemingly impossible odds, he is receiving the gratitude and plaudits of the entire civilised world

Newcastle Journal

The Prime Minister has vision without being at all a visionary, that is, he is of the select order of practical idealists, those who press forward in advance to the goal of human betterment A lesser man might have disastrously failed where he triumphantly succeeded . Europe wants surcease from frenzied excitements It wants reconstruction, for delay aggravates existing evils and creates others The spirit of a realised hope that fills Europe at present is the best of all auspices under which the trammels, political and economic, can be removed.

North Mail (Newcastle)

Materially there is nothing of which to be proud, but, in avoiding war, we have preserved to the people of Europe things of infinitely greater worth than pride. And, if time realises the wider prospect of European appeasement opened by the final conversations at Munich, events will give us reason for pride inordinate. Many Britons are resentful and hurt at the sacrifice of the Czechs. It was not justice, but it was the lesser evil.

It should not be too much to hope that the Opposition in Parliament, recognising frankly that the Premier has sacrificed nothing that could have been saved without the grave risk of war, will refrain from all attempts to make political capital out of a situation which was almost beyond political adjustment.

Sheffield Telegraph

To-day we might have been quoting "Stand up and meet the foe." Instead, Mr Chamberlain is home again, bringing, as he said, peace with honour and the hope of peace for our time. This week will never be forgotten by those who have lived through its mounting strain. War seemed to be as inevitable as it was incredible. The nation was preparing to meet the foe, fully aware of the risks to which it would be exposed, but not shrinking from the ordeal.

An almost unbelievable transformation has been brought about within three days. The plaudits of the multitude are often evanescent, but Mr Chamberlain's gallant rescue of peace when it was all but lost will still be remembered with gratitude when other minor issues are allowed to appear as overwhelming.

Sheffield Independent

The Prime Minister's triumph is on a bigger scale than we ever imagined at first and, while we shall be wise to wait for the full statement he will make in Parliament next week before allowing enthusiasm and joy to run away with judgment, we are justified in rejoicing. Not only has war been averted, but on the positive side Britain and Germany, in signing the No-War Pact, have made the hearts of the nations leap with gladness at the prospect of achieving that general appeasement which has always been the Prime Minister's policy.

Liverpool Daily Post

Mr Chamberlain, in his passionate desire to save his own people and the world from the awful horror of armed conflict, set diplomatic convention aside and employed, without regard for the ordinary usages, the great authority of a Prime Minister of Britain. He has, in fact, directed his efforts with a simple common sense which has appealed intensely to the public. No wonder, then, that he was greeted yesterday with an unprecedented enthusiasm.

The Czechs have had to submit to irresistible pressure from Powers they regarded as friends, and behind all was the threat of naked, brutal force. But the world has to seek something finer than pitting force against force. That is the task to which statesmen should now set their minds.

Daily Record (Glasgow)

The reception given to the Prime Minister on his return from Munich yesterday afternoon is but a small token of the deeper and more widespread appreciation expressed everywhere for the man who, more than anyone else, is responsible for saving Europe from a holocaust. Mr Chamberlain is not the type that seeks honours and adulation, but no doubt some special recognition of his historic services to peace and humanity will be given by his fellow-countrymen, and possibly by others as well.

It is possible, now that the danger is passed, that an effort will be made by the Opposition in Parliament on Monday to turn the international situation into a political opportunity. Mr Chamberlain may be criticised on the ground that anyone can win a peace by giving everything away. Perhaps no more apt answer to that could be forthcoming than this sentence in the *New York Times*: "Let no man say too high a price has been paid for peace in Europe until he has searched his soul and found himself willing to risk in war the lives of those nearest and dearest to him."

Glasgow Herald

Mr Chamberlain, as the first and most persistent of the peacemakers, obtains and deserves a double share of the world's praise and attention. Moreover, he has brought back with him

a very special agreement concluded—in very wide and general terms—between Herr Hitler and himself. This agreement, if it can be carried further, seems to present the most brilliant possibilities of appeasement in the future. Mr Chamberlain has created a great opportunity for international understanding. We must hope that Herr Hitler may be willing to take it.

The Scotsman (Edinburgh)

All the world is agreed that, but for the wisdom and tenacity of the British Prime Minister, Europe would have been plunged into a horrible, soul-destroying war that would have killed millions, laid great cities waste, impoverished the nations, and sown fresh seeds of bitterness and hostility in international relations. How great should be our gratitude to the statesman who has saved Europe from such a calamity.

We could not have saved Czechoslovakia except, possibly, after a long and terrible war of attrition. We believe that good will come out of the evil of yesterday, but that no good could have come out of a war.

Aberdeen Press and Journal

The Munich meeting, apart from the agreement with which it terminated, represented three distinct achievements. Herr Hitler, for the first time, was persuaded to take part in a round table conference. Hitherto he has refused to negotiate with more than one State at a time. In the second place, and again for the first time, he was persuaded to abandon his customary methods of forcible solution and to take into consideration the public opinion of the world. By these innovations in his policy he made possible the third achievement—the triumph of the democratic theory that reason can settle all disputes. To few men has it been granted to perform for humanity the service that Mr Chamberlain has rendered in these critical days.

Dundee Courier and Advertiser

Gratitude wells up in the heart of the nation as it realises the incomparable service the Prime Minister has rendered both it and the world. No longer is there room for doubt that but for

the right-mindedness and strong heartedness of this one man the most devastating of all wars would be upon us now To-day he has the rewards of success, of the whole world's admiration, and of a grateful affection such as it has rarely been the lot of a statesman to win

Western Mail (Cardiff)

No words can describe the profound relief, thankfulness and sense of deliverance which surged in all hearts on learning the truth about our escape from the blackest of catastrophes Although we are falsely accused of having betrayed the Czechs, to whom we had no treaty commitment, we have to recognise that their sacrifice is far greater than ours, and without their readiness to pay almost any price for peace we could hardly have won deliverance from war In this case the chief consolation must be sought in the fact that even a successful war would have far outweighed in cost, sacrifice, and humiliation the most dearly bought peace, and in the hope that a less barbarous and more humane spirit may now begin to animate the Nazi régime

Western Daily Press (Bristol)

The labours of our Prime Minister in the midst of terrible discouragements, his perseverance and courage which nothing could daunt, have been an inspiration, not only to his countrymen but to the whole world Whatever of good or ill the future has in store, Mr Chamberlain will rest secure in the esteem and affections of all

Western Morning News (Plymouth)

For days together the world had lived on the brink of a precipice and it was a profound relief to realise that it had been able to draw back instead of falling into the abyss Mr Chamberlain has been the miracle-worker The same qualities of initiative, courage, and perseverance which characterised his first journey to Germany were maintained to the end, and contributed in no small degree to the compromise reached in the early hours of yesterday

Sussex Daily News (Brighton)

No sane person doubts that but for Mr Chamberlain we should at this moment be at war. He will go down in history as one of the world's greatest conquerors—a conqueror whose victory has been all the greater because it has been a bloodless one.

Eastern Daily Press (Norwich)

We believe that we speak for the country generally when we say that any satisfaction at the liquidation of the Czechoslovakian crisis would have been very restricted if there had not also been a feeling that we had now taken a definite step towards the settlement of Europe on better foundations. After yesterday's demonstrations it is clear that Parliament would not be a very representative body if it did not put the seal of its approval next week on Mr Chamberlain's work.

East Anglian Daily Times (Ipswich)

Mr Chamberlain's magnificent initiative has prevented a disaster which would have shocked civilisation for a century, and shamed its very name. It is not possible to proclaim this peace agreement with unqualified pride. It has been produced at the point of the sword, and dictated out of the mouths of cannon. But it is none the less an achievement which has prevented an infamy which must have claimed the Czech-Slovakian population as part of its victims.

Nottingham Guardian

Nobody on earth wants war, and the peoples of every country are profoundly relieved that war has been averted, and enduring peace at last brought into the realm of the possible. Nobody in this country can have any love for the way in which the Czech settlement was forced by Germany. But the crisis and its solution have helped to establish one vital principle more firmly—the principle that nations should settle their differences by negotiation instead of by force.

Nottingham Journal

Mr Chamberlain returned to England yesterday the most

popular statesman in the world for his unflagging efforts to avert the catastrophe that seemed so certain and imminent three days ago His popular welcome measured the gratitude for the present peace he has snatched But a week-end pause is desirable in which everyone can collect their emotional and critical reactions after the recent surge of mixed feelings

Yorkshire Daily Observer (Bradford)

The ultimate power of democratic opinion, as seen in the way Mr Chamberlain was able to invoke it against more extreme demands, was proved in the middle of this week, when it was mobilised on almost a world scale The part played by President Roosevelt and the United States press may, along with the firm British popular voice, have turned the scale against war

Yorkshire Herald (York)

The tumultuous welcome accorded to Mr Chamberlain yesterday in London, and the rose-strewn path that opened out before M Daladier in Paris were reflexes of the joy of two nations for their deliverance from war While we owe so much to those statesmen, we remember how their words were given weight by the calm determination of Britain and France to go the limit for peace but to make plain to all what the limit was

The free press of this country has never been nearer to complete unity than in the chorus of praise and thanksgiving which followed the Conference of Munich

CHAPTER XV

Debates in Parliament

CHAMBERLAIN'S POLICY UP TO AND INCLUDING MUNICH was unquestionably approved by the great majority of his countrymen Yet it would be a mistake to interpret that, or the worldwide praise of the Prime Minister, as satisfaction with the terms

of the settlement. The conditions of the peace so narrowly won were deplored everywhere. But this was not the decisive factor in the great controversy at once opened in Parliament. Would the country have approved rejection of the Munich terms at the price of war? That was the testing question and assailants of the Government rarely came to grips with it. They often said there would have been no war, meaning that Hitler was bluffing, they often argued that a different direction of British policy would have averted both war and mutilation of Czechoslovakia. But that was speculation. The probing question was this: If the direction of affairs had been in their hands, and if they had found they were wrong about the bluff, would they have gone to war?

There were two other main considerations to which, in their speeches, opponents of the Government gave little attention. One was the attitude of France. Had the French Cabinet decided on September 13 to honour the nation's treaty obligations and go to the aid of the Czechs if they were attacked by Germany, Chamberlain would probably never have set eyes on Hitler. He would not and could not have gone to Berchtesgaden without the approval of the Paris Government. French Ministers in fact warmly welcomed his intervention. Mention has already been made in these pages of Daladier's claim to have suggested Chamberlain's first meeting with Hitler. In that he was representing French public opinion at the time. After Munich as well as before, there was the sharpest contrast between public feeling in the two countries. While in our own Parliament publication of the terms of settlement was the signal for a violent and sustained attack on the Government, those terms were approved, except for the Communists, by a virtually unanimous vote in the French Chamber.

Another significant fact was that in the debates in our Parliament opponents of the Government showed little concern about opinion in the Dominions. Yet British Governments must, in foreign policy, keep step with the Dominion Governments. The information regularly supplied to the Dominion Prime Ministers comprises not only Cabinet decisions but the facts and considerations on which such decisions are based. They are as well informed on these matters as members of our own Cabinet. And

the stream of information and opinion is not a one-way traffic Exchange of views is normal, the Dominion High Commissioners are in daily contact with the Secretary for the Dominions, and if a crisis suddenly arises Downing Street knows quickly what is thought about it in Canada, in Australia, in New Zealand, and in South Africa Throughout the summer and autumn of 1938 Britain's European policy was unquestionably approved by the Dominions Until after Hitler's annexation of Czechoslovakia in the following March, they were opposed to British commitments in central Europe

Parliament met on the Monday after the Munich Conference and four days that week were given to the debate Mr Duff Cooper, the First Lord of the Admiralty, had resigned his office during the week-end because he could no longer support the Government's policy Ancient custom gave him first hearing He was deeply stirred but it was soon seen that what moved him most was not Czechoslovakia's loss of territory but the way in which the mutilation was carried out He said he concurred in the Cabinet's acceptance of Hitler's demand for self-determination for the Sudeten areas, though he knew it meant partition The cruel terms of the Godesberg memorandum were rejected by the Cabinet Mr. Duff Cooper admitted that "the great and important" concessions secured at Munich were a "great triumph for the Prime Minister," but the final terms provided for the invasion of the country, an unnecessary humiliation against which he resigned in protest This, it is true, was only part of Mr Duff Cooper's case He thought British policy should have been bolder and, in particular, that the Fleet should have been mobilised earlier Further, he objected to the joint declaration signed by the Prime Minister and the Fuehrer on the Friday morning, in his view Chamberlain ought not to have taken such action without consultation with his colleagues and without expert diplomatic advice

The Prime Minister, who followed Mr Duff Cooper, was surprised that there should be any suspicion or criticism of the statement which he and Hitler signed "I entered into no pact," he said "I made no new commitments There is no secret understanding Our conversation was hostile to no other nation "

He then read the statement and asked, as to each of its three paragraphs, who would take exception to that? There was no reply

Chamberlain's short review of events during the preceding days sharply outlined the issue before the House. At its previous meeting war appeared to be imminent. Munich gave a last opportunity of saving the peace. The question there was not whether predominantly German areas of Czechoslovakia should be ceded to the Reich, for that had been already accepted by the Prague Government; there was nothing left to consider but the method, the conditions, and the time of the transfer. They sought an orderly instead of a violent method of carrying out an agreed decision. Hitler's Godesberg Memorandum was an ultimatum with a time-limit of six days. Munich substituted an agreed procedure to be largely directed or supervised by an International Commission. Chamberlain analysed in detail the settlement as set out in Chapter XIII, and claimed that it had averted a world catastrophe. He then announced the Cabinet's decision to advance £10,000,000 to the Czechoslovak Government, already the Chancellor of the Exchequer had asked the Bank of England to provide the necessary credit.

Next came an important declaration about the great programme of rearmament "which is daily increasing in pace and in volume."

Let no one think, because we have signed this agreement between these four Powers at Munich that we can afford to relax our efforts in regard to that programme. Disarmament on the part of this country can never be unilateral again. We have tried that once, and we very nearly brought ourselves to disaster. If disarmament is to come it must come by steps, and it must come by agreement and active co-operation, and until we have agreed upon the actual steps to be taken we here must remain on guard.

Though the main debate did not begin till the next day, Mr Attlee, the leader of the Labour Opposition opened the attack at once. Like Mr Duff Cooper, though less skilfully, he paid his tribute to Chamberlain's great exertions in the cause of peace. But if he averted war it was he who led the country into the danger. This view Mr Attlee proceeded to qualify. Hitler's

determination to dominate Europe was "the cause of the crisis" Next he cast blame on "the follies of the Peace Treaties," the maladjustments of the economic system and the failure to restrain aggression As if he realised that the Prime Minister's special responsibility was thus being whittled away, he then accused him of causing the invasion of Austria On March 7 Chamberlain said, "What country in Europe to-day, if threatened by a large Power, can rely on the League for protection? None" That, said Mr Attlee, was an invitation to Hitler and he accepted it a few days later when the German army marched into Austria Members knew, of course, that elaborately organised invasion of Austria could not have been prepared in "a few days" and must have been planned a considerable time before Mr Attlee knew it, too, and as if he felt that he was doing the Prime Minister an injustice he went on to say that weak as our Government was, "the weakness of France is even greater" "France has the greatest responsibility for this debacle of policy"

It was a confused speech Mr Attlee left members to decide for themselves to what extent the Government and the Prime Minister were culpable when due share of blame had been put on Hitler, and the French Government, and the Peace Conference, and our economic policy

Sir Archibald Sinclair who followed the Labour leader, spoke of "the flood of relief and thanksgiving which has swept over the world since the Munich Conference" So great was the Prime Minister's popular triumph that Mr Duff Cooper's resignation was "nothing short of an act of political heroism" But Sir Archibald agreed with Mr Attlee that it was the policy of the Prime Minister which had brought the country to the brink of war The British and French Governments had forced Czechoslovakia to submit to the loss of their strategic frontier

Mr Eden next joined in the tributes to the Prime Minister "We all owe him, and every citizen owes him, a measureless debt of gratitude for the sincerity and pertinacity which he has devoted in the final phase of the crisis to averting the supreme calamity of war" Mr Chamberlain's refusal to give up hope was one of the influences which finally contributed to the maintenance of peace In Mr Eden's view, it was less important to praise or

blame the terms of settlement than to examine the conditions that caused the British Government (he admitted the French Government were equally responsible) to press the partition proposals on the friendly Czechoslovakian State. The Sudeten Germans had had grievances—there was no doubt about that—but there was no oppression. And the grievances were in a fair way to settlement. Lord Runciman who “did a truly wonderful piece of work under the greatest of difficulties, had virtually reached an agreement” when the plan was vetoed from without—that is by Germany.

Mr George Lansbury, the veteran Labour pacifist, declared his great admiration for the Czechs who had “shown themselves the most Christian people in Europe or the world.” But who, he asked, would have gained anything from war? The first Conservative back-bencher to speak, Mr Raikes, answered the question. War might have been waged in revenge for the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, and the whole State would have been destroyed before anything effective could be done to prevent it. Mr Arthur Henderson supported a demand that Mr Attlee had made for the calling of a world conference. Mr Richard Law (now Minister of State) praised the Prime Minister’s efforts to keep the peace, but could not believe that he had turned the Nazi leaders from the error of their ways. Europe was now dominated by a single Power, and we had fought four wars to prevent that. Mr Dalton complained that there had been a dual direction of foreign affairs, with the Foreign Office subordinate to No 10, Downing Street. Chamberlain “was hustled, intimidated, and out-maneuvred by Hitler.” Knowing that the Home Secretary was to follow him, Mr Dalton asked whether it was true, as stated by Mr Seton Watson, that the following *démarche* was submitted to the Prague Government by the British and French Ministers:

(1) Britain and France have a duty to prevent a European war if humanly possible, and thus the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

(2) They wish the Czechoslovakian Government to realise that if it does not unconditionally, and at once, accept the Anglo-French plan it will stand before the world as solely responsible for the coming war.

(3) By refusing, Czechoslovakia will also be guilty of destroying Anglo-French solidarity, since in that event Britain will under no circumstances march even if France went to the aid of Czechoslovakia.

(4) If the refusal should provoke war, France gives official notice that she will not fulfil her treaty obligations.

Sir Samuel Hoare, the last speaker that day, replied that those four paragraphs were "in almost every respect totally inaccurate." On the general question he jerked the House back to the position as it was less than a week before. We stood on the verge of a terrible abyss. By a last possible effort the Prime Minister averted catastrophe. It was said that he should have given an ultimatum to Hitler before the Nazi rally at Nuremberg. An ultimatum then would have plunged Europe into a world war. Besides, the Prime Minister was a mediator how could he act in that role and at the same time issue threats and ultimatums? But, time after time, our position was privately made as clear as possible to Hitler.

Dealing with the position of Russia, which had been raised by Mr Dalton, Sir Samuel Hoare said her treaty obligation to go to the aid of the Czechs was to come into operation only when the French guarantee was already operating. In consultations with the Soviet Government, therefore, we naturally let the French take the lead.

Later in the speech, Sir Samuel said that by the German annexation of Austria, the strategic frontier of Czechoslovakia was turned. If there were war the country would inevitably be destroyed. Mr A V Alexander asked whether the Government at that time made representations to the Prague Government. Yes, Sir Samuel replied, after then and before. He made representations when he was Foreign Secretary and his successor, Mr Eden, pressed them even more strongly.

SECOND DAY

A feature of the debate on the second day, as on the first, was that nearly all speakers, opponents as well as supporters, expressed gratitude to the Prime Minister for the preservation of peace. In some cases the gratitude was so fervent that the

criticism which followed appeared to be incongruous Lord Cranborne, for example, testified to "relief and deep personal gratitude" to Mr Chamberlain and directly afterwards to the people's "abiding sense of shame" Sir Sidney Herbert's language was in still greater disaccord He spoke of the Prime Minister's "magnificent" work for the country and the world, and then of our "desperate humiliation" and "dishonour"

In a debate that continues from day to day much repetition is unavoidable, but it must, as far as possible, be avoided here There were cross-currents on both sides Mr Maxton declared that the Prime Minister had "done something that the mass of the common people in the world wanted doing" Another Labour member, Mr Barr, said that when he heard of the Munich settlement he went to the nearest telegraph office and sent to Chamberlain a two-word message, "Heartiest congratulations" He recalled that in 1919 the Labour Party regretted that the Sudeten Germans were not then given a plebiscite

Tuesday's debate was opened by Mr Herbert Morrison One of his main points was that the recent crisis arose out of the Government's persistent cold-shouldering of the League of Nations ever since 1931 "They turned their backs on collective security" Mr Morrison also found fault with the French their responsibility was "terrible" We betrayed the Czechs Hitler frightened the Prime Minister out of his life Mr Burgin's retort to this was that within a few hours of Chamberlain's arrival at Berchtesgaden the order for the invasion of Czechoslovakia was held up

Mr Amery agreed with some previous critics that we ought to have declared ourselves earlier He saw no substantial difference between the rejected Gödesberg terms and those which were accepted at Munich But, he added, "I am not asking the House to blame anyone, least of all the Prime Minister, who has had to face a terrible responsibility and who knows far better than any of us those weaknesses in our defences for which we might have been paying to-day a dreadful price" Captain McEwen said the issue still was—should we have gone to war? Mr Maxwell Fyffe enlarged on this let members say "at what stage they think this country ought to have gone to war or threatened war The

country would not have supported a war to keep Carlsbad and Marienbad under the Czechs. And who would say that we should have gone to war about the method of cession? No one in the House indeed, had told the Government that we ought to have an army ready for a Continental war. The guarantee now given to Czechoslovakia imposed a new risk and we must prepare for it.

Mr A V Alexander said that as far back as September 7 the Labour movement proposed the mobilisation of the forces of peace in Europe against the aggressor. "Why, then, did you not support rearmament?" asked Colonel Baldwin-Webb. Mr Alexander replied that he and his friends had offered again and again to support whatever expenditure on armaments was required for collective security.

Sir Thomas Inskip, who closed the day's debate, replied to some remarks by Mr Alexander about the non-representation of Russia at Munich. Germans and Italians were unwilling to meet the Russians, and immediate action must be taken. "If negotiations were to be successful," Sir Thomas said, "it was foolish to throw away the opportunity of having them merely because it was impossible to get five people round a table instead of only four."

Sir Thomas was sceptical about the claim of the Government's critics that greater firmness would have secured fair treatment of the Czechs without war. "The one unpardonable fault in foreign diplomacy is bluff." But the Government had made considerable preparations. The Navy was mobilised, Territorial Anti-Aircraft and Coast Defence units, the fighter elements of the Auxiliary Air Force and the Observer Corps were called up. The Censorship organisation, and the staff, were ready. Essential war materials, including a number of rare metals, had been accumulated in stocks sufficient to carry us through a long war. Yet there were gaps, serious gaps, and defects which must be remedied.

THIRD DAY

The debate made a fresh start on Wednesday with a motion asking the House to approve the Government's policy "by which war was averted," and their efforts to secure a lasting peace.

There was a Labour amendment that the House "while profoundly relieved that war has been averted for the time being," disapproved a policy that had led to the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia and demanded a return to collective security and the summoning of a world conference to consider grievances that imperil peace. There were during the day two outstanding speeches. One was the remarkably lucid and persuasive exposition and argument with which Sir John Simon proposed the motion, the other Mr Churchill's powerful attack on the Government policy and his sombre lament over its results.

Sir John Simon started with the admission that Hitler had again achieved the substance of his immediate and declared aim without war. Czechoslovakia had been put to a dreadful choice of ceding a portion of her territory or of unlimited invasion. By bringing her Government to face that alternative we did no injury to her cause. As Lord Runciman realised before he left Prague, cession of territory had become inevitable. Sir John went back to the establishment of the State twenty years before and quoted Mr Churchill and the late Arthur Henderson as to the danger of including the Sudeten Germans within its boundaries. Mr Churchill at that time compared their stubbornness to that of the Ulstermen in Ireland and said that though their exclusion would weaken the new State—perhaps fatally—their inclusion affronted the principle of self-determination. Sir John deplored the failure to secure a boundary settlement, but the League of Nations could do nothing except by a unanimous vote in the Assembly, and in such a case the vote of the State which was to lose territory would defeat the proposal. The League could not compel a change.

That the Munich settlement was "open to all sorts of challenges and criticisms," he admitted. But the position was extremely difficult. In the history of the modern world such a question had seldom been solved without war, and it remained a serious menace.

That problem of the change of frontiers and the transfer of territories is now if the modern world the chief remaining cause from which wars may arise. Practically every other historic cause has been removed. Religious wars, dynastic wars, wars which have to do with other issues have to a very

large extent ceased to be a danger to the world I am hopeful that even trade wars may be avoided.

But this problem of how you are to secure the peaceful alteration of frontiers is a problem which, if it cannot be solved by some method or other remains a potent cause of possible wars. Lord Salisbury made an arrangement with Germany by which Heligoland passed to Germany in 1890. That was passed without heat, without raising racial issues that inflamed passions. That has nothing to do with intense rivalries over a frontier which separates people from those they want to join.

Turning to the question of Russia, Sir John Simon said the Government hoped that she would join in the guarantee of Czechoslovakia "If outstanding differences are to be resolved it must be on the basis of free consultation with all European Powers."

Then he applied what he thought was the real test. The Munich terms contained "drastic conditions, very harsh stipulations. Let each member ask himself whether, if he had been Prime Minister he would have rejected those terms. The real test is this. We are at peace to-day, with these Munich terms in operation, which were accepted by the French who were under fixed treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia, though we were not. *How many amongst us are there who, if we could undo what was then done, would reject the settlement to which the Prime Minister put his hand on Friday and instead—because it was the only alternative—would fling the world into the cauldron of immediate war?*"

Mr Arthur Greenwood, in moving the Labour amendment, said the Czechs had had the rawest of raw deals. Hitler was left in command of central Europe.

Mr Churchill's speech was one of sustained gloom. "Everything had got off the rails and nothing but the Prime Minister's intervention could have saved the peace." "We have sustained a total and unmitigated defeat, and France has suffered even more than we have." The utmost Mr Chamberlain had been able to gain was that "the German dictator, instead of snatching his victuals from the table, has been content to have them served to him course by course."

We really must not waste time, after all this long debate, upon the difference between the positions reached at Berchtesgaden,

at Godesberg, and at Munich. They can be very simply epitomised, if the House will permit me to vary the metaphor. £1 was demanded at the pistol's point. When it was given £2 were demanded at the pistol's point. Finally the dictator consented to take £1 17s 6d, and the rest in promises of goodwill for the future.

The argument which followed that exordium was developed in Mr Churchill's most impressive manner. Both Governments—British and French—shared the responsibility for what ought not to have happened. Acceptance of the Munich terms or war were not the only alternatives. If the two Powers had maintained close contact with Russia during the summer, they would have been able to influence many of the smaller States of Europe, and this might have been decisive at a time when the German dictator was not irrevocably committed to his new adventure. Indeed, he thought the terms the Prime Minister brought back from Munich could easily have been agreed through the ordinary diplomatic channels at any time during the summer. But Mr Churchill's condemnation reached much farther back.

This is the consequence of five years of futile good intentions, five years of eager search for the line of least resistance, five years of uninterrupted retreat of British power, five years of neglect of air defences.

We have been reduced in those five years from a position of security so overwhelming and so unchallengeable that we never cared to think about it. We have been reduced from a position where the very word "war" was considered one which would be used only by persons qualifying for a lunatic asylum.

And now a disaster of the first magnitude had befallen Great Britain and France. All the countries of central and eastern Europe would make the best terms they could with the triumphant Nazi Power. In fact, if not in form, they would, one after the other, be drawn into the vast system of power politics radiating from Berlin, and Mr Churchill believed this could be achieved quite smoothly and silently and need not entail the firing of a single shot. The rulers of Nazi Germany would have a free choice open to them in whatever direction they turned their eyes. He feared that we had deeply compromised, and perhaps fatally endangered the safety and even the independence of Great

Britain and France The whole resources of our country and its united strength should be bent to the task of rearmament and especially to the establishment of security in the air

Sir Henry Page Croft, who followed, said Czechoslovakia was so vulnerable that it would have been a crime to urge her people to resist when they would have been destroyed before help could reach them One comment by Sir John Wardlaw Milne was that if our ability to fight was no higher than Mr Churchill put it, we should be no worse off, but better able to meet him, if Hitler broke his word in six months or a year Europe knew now what it did not know a few weeks ago that, anxious as we are for peace, there are vital issues on which we would not hesitate to fight Sir Robert Young, a Labour member, said he told his constituents that he would be no party to a war which could be avoided by the delimitation of frontiers If the Sudeten Germans wanted to go to the Nazi hell, let them!

Sir Stafford Cripps complained that the Government had never had a constructive policy for peace and merely tried to prevent war when the danger of it became imminent "Sweet reasonableness which consists in giving away the property of others and building up huge armaments to protect what is your own will never solve the problem of peace" Mr Thurtle agreed that the Government were blamable for the situation which had arisen, but the Prime Minister was justified in taking risks for peace and, for himself, he would rather have the Munich agreement than war Mr Harold Nicolson's position was rather different If that had been all, he would have accepted the Anglo-French plan rather than war, but it was not all, and "the Munich capitulation" made it clear that Germany was the dominant power in Europe

Mr Grenfell, who summed up for Labour, said democracy had lost prestige and authority in the world The pass had been handed over Hitler was given the keys of eastern Europe at Munich

Mr Butler, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, quoted tributes of admiration and gratitude which had reached the Prime Minister from the smaller European states Replying to Mr Churchill's remarks on what might have been done earlier

in the year, he said that during the whole time the Government had done all that could be done in Berlin and Prague to reach a satisfactory solution. British advisers were sent to Czechoslovakia, Lord Runciman was sent and, finally Mr Chamberlain himself interposed. Mr Butler read to the House the instructions given to the British Minister at Prague for the communication made to the Czech Government on September 21st. This completely disposed of the sinister threats in the version given by Mr Dalton on the first day of the debate and attributed by him to Mr Seton Watson.

Mr Butler's reply to Mr. Churchill's charge that we had broken up the League of Nations was based on his own experience at Geneva. British delegates had tried in vain to simplify the procedure; some States would not allow the unanimity rule to be modified as we wished in order to make the machinery move more rapidly in time of difficulty. The original general obligation under Article XVI had been repudiated by some States each of which reserved its right to judge every case on its merits and to take such action as might seem possible. The more he examined the machinery of the League the more he admired it—and the more he found it not easy of application at the present time. In constructing a peace system our Government felt they could not ignore the forces outside the League.

FOURTH DAY

As the debate went on, the Opposition became less aggressive. The Prime Minister noted this when he made the closing speech on Thursday afternoon. There was a great contrast, he said, between the speech of Mr Attlee, who had just sat down, and those of some of his colleagues on the Front Opposition Bench. It was a great contrast, indeed, with the speech Mr Atlee himself made on the opening day.

Mr Noel Baker, who resumed the debate on Thursday, concentrated mainly on the failure of the Government to make more use of the League of Nations. In the Covenant system lay the hope of the future. Sir John Gilmour, as one who had been a supporter of the League, replied that discussion at Geneva had not brought the results expected. Mr Graham White, a Liberal,

regretted that there were a motion and an amendment on the order paper "We might well have been content with getting the maximum amount of agreement and unity at this time of great difficulty" The desire and intention to establish better relations with the dictatorial States was right, but it would not be done by concealing our own views Nor did we want peace to be settled on a basis of ultimatum and threat Whatever achievement Hitler had made, it was incomparable with the position that would be his if he were to set himself resolutely at the head of the peace forces of the world

Two women members followed, Miss Horsbrugh and Miss Wilkinson They both rejoiced that war had been averted, and Miss Horsbrugh gave general support to the peace policy of the Government, but Miss Wilkinson blamed the Prime Minister for leading the country into a position which called for his "dramatic improvisation in the last five minutes" Mr McGovern told the House that "in the circumstances the right thing was done" That was the judgment also of Sir Edward Grigg Would the Prime Minister, he asked, have been justified in leading the country into war? "My answer, every day and every night, was No!"

As already indicated, Mr Attlee's speech was pitched lower than his previous one He said no Government could control world events and then observed that present Ministers ought to have assumed power over events Peace would not be maintained by continuing the policy of the past seven years Nor would the world be led back to sanity by piling up armaments Minority grievances would not be got rid of easily, but the effort should be made There must be some kind of economic planning, trade barriers must be dealt with

The Prime Minister, in his reply, said he could not remember a debate in which there were so many allusions—some complimentary, some not—to a single Minister "Looking back on the events, I feel convinced that by my action—I seek no credit for my action, I think it is only what anyone in my position would have felt it his duty to do—I say, by my action I did avoid war, I feel equally sure that I was right in doing so"

It was said that we should have told Germany weeks ago that

if her army crossed the border of Czechoslovakia, we should be at war with her. His reply was that the people of this country would not have supported a war to prevent the Sudeten Germans from joining the Reich. The Dominions also had a right to be consulted, and it would have been difficult to convince them that war on such an issue would be justified.

Then it was said that if we were not prepared to say we would go to war on that issue we ought to have told Czechoslovakia long ago that in no circumstances would we help her and that she had better make the best terms she could with the Sudetens or with Germany. But the issue was not so simple as that. France was under treaty obligation to go to the assistance of Czechoslovakia.

Were we to say that we would not go to the assistance of France if, in consequence, she became involved in conflict with Germany? If so we should have been false to our own obligations. Therefore, it would not have been enough for us to tell Czechoslovakia that we would have nothing to do with her and that she must make the best terms she could. It would have been necessary for France also to say that.

Was anybody prepared to say that France should do that beforehand? He would not have cared to be the one who made such a suggestion to a French Minister.

In parenthesis, Chamberlain replied to suspicions expressed that it was intended to have an early general election. That was not in his mind except in the event of two possible contingencies (1) that some new issue arose which required a new mandate from the country, or (2) that he lost the confidence of his supporters. He would not like to snatch party advantage by capitalising the nation's thankfulness for peace. And there was another reason "It is possible that we may want great efforts from the nation in the months that are to come, and if that be so the smaller our differences the better."

Turning to future policy, Chamberlain said there were only two alternatives. One was to rule out any sort of friendly relations with the totalitarian States. That would mean certain war. If we took that view we must arm ourselves to the teeth, must make military alliances with any other Powers which would join us,

and hope that we could start the war at the moment that suited us and not at the moment that suited the other side That policy contained all the things which the Labour Party used to denounce—entangling alliances, balance of power, and power politics It was certainly not the collective security we used to expect from the League of Nations

The policy he had described was one of utter despair, he rejected it He did not believe in an inevitable war We should seek by all means in our power to avoid war, by analysing possible causes, by trying to remove them, by discussion in a spirit of collaboration and goodwill His critics had the same idea in mind when they suggested a world conference But it was better to have no conference at all than one which failed It was no use calling a conference of Powers, including the totalitarian Powers, without knowing that they would attend and would support the right policy

Then there was the question of rearmament He was challenged to reconcile rearmament with what he said on his return from Munich about "peace in our time" On that he said

I hope hon members will not be disposed to read into words used in a moment of some emotion, after a long and exhausting day, after I had driven through miles of excited, enthusiastic, cheering people—I hope they will not read into those words more than they were intended to convey

I do, indeed, believe that we may yet secure peace in our time, but I never meant to suggest that we should do that by disarmament until we can induce others to disarm, too Our past experience has shown us only too clearly that weakness in armed strength means weakness in diplomacy, and if we want to secure a lasting peace, I realise that diplomacy cannot be effective unless the consciousness exists, not here alone but elsewhere, that behind the diplomacy is the strength to give effect to it

Further, the Prime Minister declared that the policy of appeasement did not mean that we were going to seek new friends at the expense of old ones or, indeed, at the expense of any other nations There had never been more complete identity of view between the French and British Governments than now "Their

objective is the same as ours—to obtain the collaboration of all nations, not excluding the totalitarian States, in building up a lasting peace for Europe ”

The vote of confidence in the Government was carried by 369 votes to 150 Conservative critics did not vote, but the number of abstentions was about balanced by the number of Labour, Liberal, and Independent members who voted with the Government

THE HOUSE OF LORDS

The Munich debate in the House of Lords, extending over three sittings, was an impressive contrast with that in the Commons There the Government was attacked with a passion engendered in the Spanish Civil War controversies and fed into flame again by the tragedy of Czechoslovakia In the Lords, while there were a few speeches, notably those of Lord Lloyd and Lord Lytton, in which the Munich terms inspired indignant protest, there was no counterpart to the attacks on the Prime Minister in the Commons No member challenged a vote Even more than in the other House, the speakers were men of experience in government, and most of them supported the policy pursued by the Cabinet

To give a detailed analysis of the proceedings would be to report much that has already been said But some saliences of the debate should be indicated

Lord Halifax referred to the absence of a Russian representative from Munich and repeated what he had said about this to Mr Maisky, the Soviet Ambassador, a day or two before “Five days ago,” he said, “it seemed to us vital, if war was to be avoided, somehow to get matters on a basis of negotiation, but if we were to face the facts we were obliged to recognise that, in present circumstances, the heads of the German and Italian Governments would almost certainly—at least not without preliminary discussion for which there was not time—be reluctant to sit in conference with a Soviet representative ” But that “in no way signified any weakening of the desire on our part, any more no doubt than on that of the French Government, to preserve our understanding and relations with the Soviet Government ”

In a tribute to Mr Beneš, Lord Halifax said "Without his help it would have been impossible to avoid a European war"

This is from his tribute to the Prime Minister "What I think the world can never measure was the almost unbearable weight that rested personally and alone upon his shoulders. This no colleague could share, and for the manner in which he bore it no thanks of his fellow-men can be too great. He was engaged all those days in a race against time, the stakes the lives of millions, and I shall always be grateful for the privilege of having been allowed to work so closely with him."

Lord Lytton said he felt more profoundly distressed about the Munich settlement than he had ever been before by any event. Lord Newton felt humiliated Hitler had got what he wanted. That, indeed, was not in controversy. Lord Stonehaven thought it was a case of "the mistakes of Versailles coming home to roost." Lord Snell, the leader of the Labour Opposition, remarked that behind the sense of deliverance there was a deep sense of misgiving.

Lord Samuel spoke as one of four members of the House who were in the Cabinet when the World War of 1914-18 began. The others were Lord Crewe, Lord Gainford, and Lord Runciman. "We are thankful for the happier ending of crisis now." Another of these veterans, Lord Gainford, rejoiced that the world had been saved from overwhelming disaster.

A significant reference to the League of Nations was made by Lord Crewe. He said he was inclined to think that posterity will be disposed to blame the League for having paid attention exclusively to the penalties which could be exacted from those who made war rather than giving its time and attention to removing the causes of war. "The name of Hitler might never have been heard of if a different course had been taken at Geneva."

Lord Baldwin, who was making his maiden speech as a peer, gave whole-hearted support to the Prime Minister. No Minister should commit the country to war unless he was convinced it was ready. And he entered a protest against the suggestion that there was "something unclean in having to face discussions with a dictator. I wonder if they realise that one of the greatest

difficulties throughout the last five years has been how to get into contact with the dictators ”

Two distinguished Service-men were on the same side Lord Chatfield stressed the impossibility of giving effectual aid to the Czechs in time “What is the good of saying to a man in the lion’s den ‘Never mind if he does eat you up, I am going to stop his rations for the future?’” A great leader of the Air Force, Lord Trenchard, remarked that even if it was only temporary, the Munich Agreement gave time for reflection before the new air weapon was brought into use “Anything that could put back the use of that weapon was a good thing ”

CHAPTER XVI

The Darkening Sky

THE STRESS AND STRAIN WERE OVER NAVAL MOBILISATION had ended Reservists had gone back to their homes The newspapers were concerned now, not with preparations for immediate war, but with the organisation of British Legion volunteers for police duty in the plebiscite areas of Czechoslovakia Twelve hundred of them were recruited, each armed with “a bog-ash walking stick,” and they had got as far as Tilbury before it was found that their services were not needed The Czechoslovak Foreign Minister went to Berlin on October 12, and two days later it was announced that agreement had been reached about the new frontier and that there would be no plebiscites

President Benes had resigned on October 5, and no one else could check the demoralisation that quickly followed Nazi pressure was seen in the Prague Government’s order dissolving the Communist Party and prohibiting its publications On October 21 the Foreign Minister informed the Soviet representative that his Government were no longer interested in their agreement with Russia The Ruthenians broke away from Czechoslovakia and declared their independence Touring

Sudetenland, Hitler boasted of Germany's triumph. The problem of Czech refugees was causing anxiety and the Lord Mayor of London opened a fund for their relief.

There was no improvement in the German attitude towards Britain. For a few days after Munich there were polite references to Chamberlain in the Berlin newspapers, but their attacks on this country soon began again. Some of the speeches in the House of Commons debate were resented, Hitler was annoyed by Chamberlain's firm declaration on rearmament. It was to France that the Fuehrer now talked peace. In the days following Munich it was hinted to the French Ambassador in Berlin, M. François Poncet, that Hitler was ready for a joint declaration similar to the one that he and Chamberlain signed at Munich. When the Ambassador left Berlin on October 18 the Fuehrer expressed to him his regret that a dangerous state of tension between the Great Powers had continued after Munich. His hopes, he said, had not been fulfilled. He complained bitterly of a "fundamental antagonism" in the attitude of Britain and of the rearmament there and in the United States. His own desire was to develop the potentialities of appeasement and conciliation which the Munich Agreement seemed to contain, and he wished for an agreement with France. The Ambassador thought it was a useful interview. Negotiations quickly led to an agreement which Ribbentrop went to Paris to sign. "The preservation of general peace" was its declared aim. Both Governments not only desired "pacific and neighbourly relations," but would "endeavour with all their might" to establish them. The frontier between the two countries was solemnly recognised as permanent. If international difficulties were threatened both countries would "have recourse to mutual consultations."

The French welcomed the agreement the more because they knew the weakness of their defence organisation. It gave a measure of satisfaction in this country as some evidence, for what it was worth, that Germany now wanted to avoid war. Towards the end of November Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Halifax visited Paris, were very cordially welcomed by the people, and resumed their consultations with French statesmen. If Hitler had given

any indication that he remembered the declaration which he and Chamberlain signed at Munich, the outlook would have been brighter He said nothing, and the German Press continued its attacks on British policy and people

Parliament reassembled on November 1, and the Government's foreign policy was at once challenged. The Munich Agreement was attacked, with fewer compliments to the Prime Minister as the saviour of peace. Sir Archibald Sinclair denounced his policy as one of "scuttle and defeatism". Two days later the Commons rejected a Labour motion condemning the Government for "its admitted unpreparedness"—an audacious censure from men who had opposed any rearmament and denounced its advocates as "war-mongers".

The Italian question came up again on announcement of the Government's intention to bring into force the Anglo-Italian agreement. It was signed six months before, but, in fulfilment of the Government pledge, remained inoperative until certain conditions were complied with. Mussolini, the House was now informed, had agreed to withdraw about half the Italian forces from Spain and the remainder when the latest non-intervention plan came into operation. Though the Government's proposal was carried by a majority of 200, there was strong feeling against their Spanish policy, mostly among politicians of the Left. In the absence of official restraint, private persons could have supplied arms to either side in the civil war without any breach of neutrality. Opponents of the Government were interested only in strengthening the Republicans. Non-intervention—adopted on the initiative of M. Blum, the French Premier—meant withholding supplies from both sides. It was a new policy which had the one and only purpose of preventing the spread of the war.

Bitterness about the Spanish war had prejudiced our foreign policy generally and now Hitler was beginning to make it widely unpopular. Up to and including the Munich Conference the Government's attitude to the problems of Czechoslovakia was approved by a great majority in the country as well as in Parliament. It was felt that the alternative was war, and nobody believed that the issue warranted that. This remained true

Nothing had happened to destroy the Government case. But that was no longer the main concern of an increasing number of people. They had come to hate Hitler and all his works, and he was continually adding fuel to the flame of their just wrath.

In November a young German diplomat, vom Rath, was murdered in Paris by a youth, a Polish Jew. There was no reason to believe that anyone in Germany shared responsibility for the crime. That did not matter; any excuse was good enough for a pogrom against the Jews. Reprisals were ordered and organised with devilish efficiency. The planned, calculated cruelty of it horrified all civilised people. British, French, and American protests were in vain. The Nazis had no sense of shame for these atrocities they were, indeed, proud of them.

Chamberlain shared the public's horror and indignation. But he would not yet abandon his peace efforts—the worse the conduct of the Germans the greater the danger to Europe and the world, and the more pressing the duty to stop the plague. As we might be driven to war, let us be ready for it, and let us first exhaust all other means of restoring security. He had been working for this ever since he came to the Premiership eighteen months before. Would he be able to complete his task? Ought he to submit the whole case to the country in a general election? The prospect tempted him, and it would have been easy to find some issue which would make a Dissolution of Parliament possible without breach of any pledge, but the idea was soon rejected, and he never returned to it. How, indeed, would the position have been presented to the constituencies without public danger? Electioneering controversies about it would have added to every difficulty if the stage of negotiations were reached. How could any spokesman of the Government have told the whole truth about British armaments to the electors, and, therefore, to the world? It could not be done in Parliament, and it was this that made so much discussion there unreal.

A friend who called on the Prime Minister about this time remarked that he would need all the patience he could store up. "Yes," he replied, "and persistence!" And he repeated that he would take no responsibility for war unless he could say that he had done everything in his power to prevent it. But the outlook

was darkening. Bad temper in German official quarters was shown by a strange incident on December 13. Mr Chamberlain and Lord Halifax were to speak at the annual dinner of the Foreign Press Association. An early copy of the Prime Minister's speech was issued to the Press with the usual request that it should not be published till after dinner. But the German references were at once telephoned to Berlin. An order was then given that the German journalists should not attend—this although they would have been there as hosts and their Ambassador was expected at the top table. Some of them did not receive the warning notice till they arrived at the hotel, where a German official turned them back. It was supposed that this affront to the Prime Minister was due to a passage in his speech in which he protested against a German newspaper attack on Lord Baldwin.

A week later he was asking the rulers of Germany to say openly whether they were prepared to co-operate in removing the menace of a European war. On that note of interrogation the exciting story of 1938 ended. The year had brought a great deliverance, but the sky was again heavily clouded.

CHAPTER XVII

A Foul Blow

IN HIS MESSAGE TO CONGRESS ON JANUARY 4, 1939, President Roosevelt said "A war which threatened the world was averted, but peace is by no means assured." Full peace, indeed, did not exist. Japanese armies were ravaging China, civil war still raged in Spain. Germany had organised vast and powerfully equipped armies and air forces, and they were not designed for ornament. It was this which was compelling Britain to spend many hundreds of millions of pounds on rearmament. The Royal Navy, after meeting bare needs on the seas nearer home, was not strong enough to safeguard British interests in the Far East. This was a continuing anxiety and embarrassment, the more so as the Japanese knew our weakness and were

impudent in affronts which they would not have dared to perpetrate if we had been able to meet them at sea on equal terms

In Europe the most important international event in the early days of the New Year was the visit of Mr Chamberlain and Lord Halifax to Rome. There was no set discussion and, indeed, no agenda, no bargaining was attempted on either side and no agreements sought. It was a mission of exploration in which personal contacts were counted as most useful. Even among friends of the Government there were doubts as to its wisdom, and on a surface view of the facts criticism was easy. The visitors had two things specially in mind. One was the position in the Mediterranean—where secure communications were vitally important not only for Imperial Defence, but for trade with the Middle East, North-east Africa, India, the Far East, Australia and New Zealand. This was a question on which Empire opinion was very sensitive, and it would have been an immense gain to safeguard the future in this central sea and the ocean routes with which it is linked by the Strait of Gibraltar and the Suez Canal. Security there could be none without an understanding with Italy—or war to enforce it, and the British Government still hoped that war might be avoided.

One other question was in Chamberlain's mind when the visit to Rome was arranged. He thought the time had come to end the war in Spain and he wished to secure Italian co-operation in arranging an armistice. Hope of this was destroyed by events. Fortune was favouring General Franco, whose offensive against Catalonia was making such progress that armistice talk then would have been futile.

Relations with Germany were still discouraging. A British Naval Mission was in Berlin to discuss the modification of Anglo-German naval ratios in accordance with the new Agreement. But there was little diplomatic intercourse on the highest level and no approach to the long-deferred political discussions. Hitler's interests at this time were in other directions. There were reports of private talks with Poland about the future of the free city of Danzig. German ambitions for the Ukraine were being stimulated, that Hitler should suddenly become polite to Britain was no relief to the minds of those who had closely

watched his methods. In an address to the Reichstag on January 30, he said he believed in a long peace between England and Germany, for the interests of the two countries did not conflict and Germany had no intention of damaging the interests of Britain at any point. We soon learned that this meant no more than that he wanted to lull British suspicions while he was plotting further mischief.

Danzig unrest notwithstanding, Polish relations with Germany continued to look friendly. In the first week of January, Colonel Beck, the Foreign Minister, was received by Hitler. A fortnight later it was announced that Ribbentrop would visit Warsaw on January 25, the fifth anniversary of the Polish Agreement with Germany. The *Gazeta Polski* declared that "our relations with Germany are growing more and more favourable." In his speech at Warsaw on the 25th Ribbentrop said that "a firm understanding with Poland was an essential element in the Fuehrer's policy." Next day he went a stage farther. The Agreement of 1934, he declared, "has put a final end to enmity between our two peoples." When saying this, he must have known of the campaign already opened at Danzig with the purpose of causing conflict between Poland and the German majority party that ruled the city.

In Birmingham, on January 28, Chamberlain spoke of political tension. Close observers were again looking anxiously towards Czechoslovakia. The Germans were turning the screw on the Prague Government. For any ordinary purposes this was unnecessary. Czech Ministers had already been bullied into subservience to Berlin. On January 21 Hitler told the Foreign Minister bluntly that there was no room in Czechoslovakia for an anti-German policy. Nor was there one. Germans within the mutilated State received preferential treatment; they were even exempt from military service. For nearly twenty years there had been a French Military Mission in the country; it was there no longer. Though the alliances with France and Russia had become ineffective, Hitler wanted them formally repudiated. The army was to be reduced and German officers appointed on its staff. And then, in the middle of March, Hitler suddenly and swiftly struck the knock-out blow. The Slovaks had given great

trouble and the Prague Government at last dismissed the Premier, Dr Tiso Hitler thereupon declared himself the protector of the Slovaks Tiso was called to Berlin and treated with special favour

Then the Fuehrei proceeded to destroy the Czech State On March 14, President Hacha was summoned from Prague to Berlin, as Dr Schuschnigg had been summoned from Vienna to Berchtesgaden a year before—and the Czech appears to have received even worse treatment than the Austrian He was closeted with Hitler till four o'clock next morning During that time he was forced to sign a document in which he declared that "in order to attain a final, lasting pacification he has placed the fate of the Czech people in the hands of the Reichsfuehrer" There were telephone communications with Prague At three, while the President was still with the Fuehrer, the Czech Cabinet decided to surrender Nineteen German divisions were already moving on the frontier and resistance was declared to be impossible Czech troops were ordered to remain in barracks and to give up their arms to the enemy

German forces occupied Prague that morning The Czech provinces of Bohemia and Moravia were declared to be German Protectorates, Ruthenia was transferred to Hungary, whose troops had invaded it even before the Germans marched into Prague Thus, in a few hours was Czechoslovakia utterly destroyed The gold in the National Bank, valued at £18,000,000, was seized and transferred to Berlin Hitler was always ready to expropriate other people's savings

His latest outrage violated so many pledges that some new excuses for it had to be found He had said many times that after the cession of the Sudeten districts he would desire no more territorial gains in Europe The Reich was for Germans, he did not want alien races in it And the Czechs are Slav In a proclamation on March 16, he set up the pretence that they were a danger to Germany The annexation of Bohemia and Moravia was based on the principle of self-preservation There must be a reasonable Central European Order with its roots in history as well as geography Here Hitler's mind was back in the Holy Roman Empire

The British Government at once protested, telling the German Government that its action was "devoid of any basis of legality" It was, moreover, "a complete repudiation of the agreement reached at Munich" France and Russia also made vigorous protest The United States refused to recognise the "new order"

The British public needed no telling that their politics had been transformed by this latest outrage As Chamberlain said in Birmingham two nights later, the hopes of appeasement and negotiation had been "wantonly shattered" He recalled the personal assurance which Hitler gave him at Godesberg that the Sudeten areas were the last of his territorial ambitions in Europe This the Fuehrer repeated afterwards in Berlin and added "I have assured Mr Chamberlain, and I emphasise it now, that when this problem is solved, Germany has no more territorial problems in Europe I shall not be interested in the Czech State any more, and I can guarantee it" How could Hitler's actions be reconciled with his often repeated pledges?

We are told that this seizure of territory has been necessitated by disturbances in Czechoslovakia If there were disorders, were they not fomented from without? Does not the question inevitably arise in our minds, if it is so easy to discover good reasons for ignoring assurances so solemnly and so repeatedly given, what reliance can be placed upon any other assurances that come from the same source?

Was this, Chamberlain asked, the end of an old adventure or the beginning of a new? Was it the last attack upon a small State, or were there to be others? Was there to be an attempt to dominate the world by force? These grave questions would require serious consideration, not only by Germany's neighbours but by others, "perhaps even beyond the confines of Europe" And then the Prime Minister went on to say

I do not believe there is anyone who will question my sincerity when I say there is hardly anything I would not sacrifice for peace But there is one thing I must except, and that is the liberty that we have enjoyed for hundreds of years and which we will never surrender That I, of all men, should be called upon to make such a declaration—that is the measure of the extent to which these events have shattered the confidence which was just beginning to show its head and which,

if it had been allowed to grow, might have made this year memorable for the return of all Europe to sanity and stability

It is only six weeks ago that I pointed out that any attempt to dominate the world by force was one which the Democracies must resist, and I added that I could not believe that such a challenge was intended, indeed, with the lessons of history for all to read, it seems incredible that we should see such a challenge

I feel bound to repeat that, while I am not prepared to engage this country by new unspecified commitments operating under conditions which cannot now be foreseen, yet no greater mistake could be made than to suppose that, because it believes war to be a senseless and cruel thing, this nation has so lost its fibre that it will not take part to the uttermost of its power in resisting such a challenge if it ever were made

In the House of Commons on Monday, March 20, there was a remarkable change of temper. The issue that had so sharply divided opinion for many months was closed. Differences about foreign policy were now concerned with the past. Of the future, members of all parties were thinking with one mind. Hitler's crime against Czechoslovakia had unified British opinion. Chamberlain's Birmingham speech had, in the main, satisfied the House. The two Oppositions and a few dissident Conservatives disliked his justification of past policy, but they agreed that on the present attitude to Germany he had struck the right note. Leaders of the Labour Party and the independent Liberals and a representative Labour deputation saw the Prime Minister privately and were informed of what the Government were doing or proposed to do. The Political Correspondent of the *Sunday Times* said at the week-end that "the Government are taking a foremost part in the movement to resist further acts of aggression by Germany."

On March 31 Chamberlain made the following statement to the House

I am glad to have this opportunity of stating again the general policy of His Majesty's Government. They have constantly advocated the adjustment, by way of free negotiation between the parties concerned, of any differences that may arise between them. They consider that this is the

natural and proper course where differences exist. In their opinion there should be no question incapable of solution by peaceful means, and they would see no justification for the substitution of force or threats of force for the method of negotiation.

As the House is aware, certain consultations are now proceeding with other Governments. In order to make perfectly clear the position of His Majesty's Government in the meantime before those consultations are concluded I now have to inform the House that, during that period, in the event of any action which clearly threatened Polish independence, and which the Polish Government accordingly considered it vital to resist with their national forces, His Majesty's Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Polish Government all support in their power. They have given the Polish Government an assurance to this effect.

I may add that the French Government have authorised me to make it plain that they stand in the same position in this matter as do His Majesty's Government.

The Government, and the British public in all its parties and sections, had travelled far in a few days. Such a pledge to Poland would have been unthinkable by Chamberlain's predecessors—or by himself—a few weeks before. How was it to be redeemed? It was unlikely that either we or the French could give Poland military aid in personnel or material in the early stages of a war. The Poles knew that as well as we did. What the Prime Minister's statement meant was that if Germany attacked Poland she would at once be at war also with Britain and France.

Czechoslovakia had made Hitler content for only a week. On March 22 he presented Lithuania with an ultimatum calling for the surrender of Memelland within three days. Memelland was taken from Germany by the Treaty of Versailles. Its population was mostly German and the process of Nazification had been pressed on there as in Danzig. Lithuania made no pretence of resisting Hitler's demand. She did not even take advantage of the three days of grace allowed in the ultimatum, but surrendered the city at once. It was another bloodless victory for the Fuehrer.

A few days later came an ugly reminder that there was more

than one aggressor in Europe. On April 7, Good Friday, Mussolini invaded Albania. This weak country, formerly Turkish, had been an independent State since 1913. There had been a Pact of Friendship with Italy since 1925. It did not give Mussolini all he wanted and he submitted proposals which the Albanians rejected because they encroached on the country's independence. On April 4 the British Government directed the attention of the Rome Government to reports of intense military and naval activity at Bari and Brindisi. In reply to these representations, Count Ciano gave an unqualified assurance that no military action was intended against Albania. The falsity of this was proved three days later when, without declaration of war or any other warning, Albanian ports were seized by Italian forces. Resistance was impossible, and King Zog fled. The conquest was cheap at the time, but the price of it has been mounting ever since.

CHAPTER XVIII

Summing Up

AT THE GREAT TURNING-POINT NOW REACHED IT IS opportune to review and sum up British policy during the nearly two years after Neville Chamberlain succeeded to the Premiership in May, 1937. From the first he saw the risks of failure. In recent months he had seen the odds piling up against him. But he always said that even if he failed, and his own career was wrecked, he should still believe without any doubt that it was right to try to bring Germany and Italy back into the comity of nations and so to prevent otherwise inevitable war. If he had succeeded, no matter what misadventures by the way, the world would have acclaimed the achievement. And in such a case, failure is in itself no discredit. When we are awarding praise or blame, the main questions to be first answered are (1) were the aims and objects of policy right? and (2) were they pursued with wisdom and courage and the prudence that no Government can afford to neglect?

Look back on the state of Europe in the early summer of 1937 Germany and Italy were breaking away from the European system It was increasingly difficult to keep up normal contacts with the heads of their Governments On German rearmament, at first secret, the resources of the country had for several years been concentrated The spirit of the German Government was combative and defiant Nobody could doubt that there would be war unless tendencies were reversed

No longer did the rest of Europe regard the League of Nations as a sure shield By the original conception of the League member-States shared responsibility for putting down aggression The doctrine was accepted by all so long as danger appeared to be remote Each State retained its full sovereign power and nothing bound it to undertake international police duty against its own free and independent judgment Germany was outside the League, had, indeed, become its enemy Japan, another ex-member State, was making war on China Italy was still in the League, but not of it The United States were friendly, but aloof

In practice there were only two Powers—Britain and France—which were thought of as possible executants of League policy against aggressors, if force had to be used There had recently been a test case and the peace-loving statesmen of Europe were sadly reflecting on the lamentable result

The League branded Italy as the aggressor against Abyssinia Economic sanctions were imposed, but not such as to be decisive French support of measures against Italy was less than half-hearted, and it soon became known that Laval had seen Mussolini and told him that French interests were not opposed to his East African designs The British Government would not have shrunk from joint action, and the Mediterranean Fleet had been considerably strengthened when the crisis came to a head This country was, indeed, the only one that made any military preparations to enforce League policy As Sir Samuel Hoare said in the House of Commons on December 19, 1935

There is the British Fleet in the Mediterranean, there are British reinforcements in Egypt, in Malta, and Aden. Not a ship, not a machine, not a man has been moved by any other member-State

But no one seriously argued that Britain alone should provide the League's fighting forces. What a mockery of "collective security" that would have been—only one Power in all the world ready to make any sacrifice to attain it! It was a responsibility, moreover, that Britain ought not to accept, and with common prudence could not. Germany was in a dangerous temper. Italy was moving towards a German alliance. Japan was eager to pounce against British interests in the Far East. No Minister dare confess in public—to all the world!—how unready we were to cope with such a formidable combination.

It would have been better for the League to do nothing about Abyssinia than to demonstrate its impotence. Anticipation of the result provided some excuse for the Laval-Hoare peace plan—excuse but not justification to the British public, for the world had been told of our enduring support of the League cause, and to desert it without a word of prior explanation, and while the war was still undecided, would have been humiliating. The Cabinet's hasty acceptance of the plan was as hastily reversed. Chamberlain supported the reversal. Afterwards, when the war was over, he publicly advocated, in advance of Cabinet decision, the abandonment of sanctions that no longer served any purpose.

That was in June, 1936. Between then and his succession to the Premiership in May, 1937, the European outlook steadily worsened. A man of Chamberlain's ideals and temper could not stand by and do nothing to prevent catastrophe. For catastrophe there would be unless the gulf between Germany and Italy and their neighbours could somehow be bridged. He was not thinking merely of establishing better relations between Britain and the Governments of Hitler and Mussolini. That was only the first step towards a general European settlement. He saw no way forward except that of direct appeal to the two dictators, but that and the negotiations he hoped would follow were preliminary to a comprehensive international conference where decisions would be made. There was no thought of bilateral bargains with Germany or of any action which would separate us from France.

It was said by some that the Government should have led in the formation of a Grand Alliance against the Dictators—

a combination of the Powers, large and small, that saw their liberties in peril and were prepared to make common cause in their defence. Review of the conditions at the time shows no prospect of success for such a project.

Of the States contiguous to Germany, Czechoslovakia was in alliance with France. The purpose of the alliance was mutual support against Germany. What chance was there of persuading others to follow that example? Belgium, in 1936, had adopted a policy of neutrality so strict that right up to the invasion of the country, in 1940, the Brussels Government refused to enter into military conversations with Britain or France. Dutch neutrality was maintained with the same resolution, and so was that of Denmark and the Scandinavian States. Neutrality, they believed, was the surest safeguard of their peace. They proved to be wrong. Would the Grand Alliance have given them security? At that time neither we nor France could provide them with aeroplanes and guns and tanks, and they could not supply themselves. Unarmed they were helpless.

Poland, a considerable military Power, though lacking modern equipment, entered into a ten years' agreement with Germany in 1934. This declared that in no circumstances would either use force against the other. Relations between the two countries appeared to be good, Hitler professed friendliness. This was the position in 1937 and 1938 and till the opening months of 1939. The guarantee of Poland which Britain and France gave in the spring of 1939 would have been unacceptable only a short time before.

It has often been argued that, though the Anglo-French combination could get no substantial accession of strength from Germany's immediate neighbours, an alliance with Russia might have frightened Hitler. Russia was under treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia; she was pledged to go to her aid against aggression—if France did so. Her land forces could intervene in Czechoslovakia only after crossing Rumanian territory. In August, 1939, Russia's unreadiness for war impelled her to enter into a mutual non-aggression agreement with the Germans.

The first British overture to the German Government, in the

early weeks of the Chamberlain Premiership, provided a true augury of the difficulties ahead. The Foreign Minister, von Neurath, accepted an invitation to come to London, but the acceptance was cancelled when Hitler heard of a Spanish attack on German ships—an attack for which there was no British responsibility or foreknowledge. The opening exchange with Italy was more encouraging, for, in reply to a message which Mr Eden sent from the Prime Minister, Mussolini suggested that the so-called Gentleman's Agreement arrived at between Britain and Italy in the previous January should now be amplified. But here also the Spanish trouble prevented early negotiation, and nothing more could be done till the following year, when conversations were again proposed by Mussolini.

It was after Lord Halifax's report of his talk with Hitler at Berchtesgaden in October, 1937, that the scope of our proposed discussions with the German Government was defined, and instructions given to the British Ambassador in Berlin. If the question of Germany's claim for colonies was raised, we were ready to consider with other colony-owning Powers if and what concessions could be made; but colonies would not be transferred by Britain alone nor except as part of a general settlement in which Germany would give as well as receive. The Ambassador explained our Government's position to the Fuehrer, but could make no advance towards negotiation. It was only during short periods of the next twelve months that the political atmosphere was favourable. In March, 1938, Austria was invaded and, shortly after, there began the long Czechoslovak crisis.

One criticism of Chamberlain in the Commons' Munich debate was that his visits to Germany in September were too late; he ought to have acted sooner. Earlier pages of this record have shown that he did. The Government gave anxious consideration to the matter when the Nazis were making mischief in Sudetenland shortly after the German occupation of Austria. Chamberlain made a considered statement of policy on March 24. His speech, though criticised by the Opposition, was generally approved in the House and in the country, and there was no departure from it.

Public opinion would not have approved a declaration that

committed us to war in resistance to the transfer of the Sudeten districts to Germany. The Dominions certainly would not. Mr Chamberlain was giving special weight to Commonwealth opinion in his refusal at that stage to make a formal and definite pledge to support France if she were involved in war by fulfilment of her treaty obligation to the Czechs. But he added the warning that in such a war countries other than the parties to the original dispute might almost immediately become involved. "This is especially true," he said, "in the case of two countries like Great Britain and France with long associations of friendship, with interests closely interwoven, devoted to the same ideals of democratic liberty, and determined to uphold them."

Mr Churchill welcomed this statement, and said there was evidently a defensive alliance with France. His only complaint was that we did not say so outright and enter into the appropriate military convention. Earlier in his speech, Chamberlain had put first in a short list of British commitments, "the defence of France and Belgium against unprovoked aggression." We should certainly have regarded it as "unprovoked aggression" if France, in the fulfilment of her treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia, had been involved in war with Germany.

But for German intrigue and agitation the Czechs would have tided over the crisis in the summer of 1938. Lord Runciman's mediation between the Prague Government and the Sudeten leaders was conducted with great skill. The concessions he secured more than covered the demands made by the German-speaking districts of Czechoslovakia when he began his difficult task. But the Sudeten chiefs came under the orders of Hitler, the millions of Germans they led were worked up by his Nuremberg speech into a violent nationalistic temper, nothing would now satisfy them but incorporation in the Reich—and they had Hitler's pledge that this would be achieved. It was cession or war. If there was war the whole country would be occupied. The annexation of Austria a few months before had robbed the principal Czech defences of value they could now be turned and the whole country overrun before help could come from any quarter. In these tragic circumstances, Lord Runciman offered

sound advice to the Czech Government when he recommended that the Sudeten areas should be given the right of self-determination. Nobody doubted that this would mean their transfer to Germany. Nor was there any reason for doubt that the transfer would be made even if self-determination were denied. The State was already disintegrating.

German armies were mobilised in overwhelming strength, a great labour force had been working all the summer on the Siegfried Line, which was the new defence against France. War appeared to be imminent. News that the Germans were expected to march against Czechoslovakia within a few days reached the British and French Governments at the same time in September. Inquiry was made from London as to what the French proposed to do. It was found that no effective intervention had been decided upon. They were not then prepared to fulfil their treaty obligation to support the Czechs against aggression. Indeed, they desired the British Government to resume mediation. M. Daladier afterwards stated that in this conjuncture he asked Mr Chamberlain to adopt an exceptional procedure.

The Prime Minister had already been considering this. He had decided what in the last resort he would do, and the last resort was now Hitler, who knew when to pounce for easy gains, saw obstacles disappearing from his course. Conquest would give him the whole country. The Czechs would resist, France would be drawn in, though too late, and Britain also would then be involved. Both countries were unprepared for war. France was deplorably weak in the air, and her production of aircraft was very small. The great British plans for rearmament were still in the preparatory stages. Production had been speeded up in the relatively small existing munition plants, but the big new factories had not yet come into action. The public had not realised how long the time-lag would be and that, even when the nation was making the greatest possible efforts, years would pass before production was fully developed. Germany was well informed about our unpreparedness in 1938. In this month of September Goering gave to Sir Nevile Henderson "fairly accurate details" of British strength in anti-aircraft guns and air defences generally.

Such was the background of Chamberlain's first meeting with Hitler at Berchtesgaden French indecision, British unpreparedness Above all things the Fuehrer respected force He may not have been aware of the full extent of British weakness, but he must have known that Germany could maintain her superiority for several years Chamberlain, of course, was precisely informed about the arms position If France fulfilled her treaty obligation to Czechoslovakia, we should go to her support, knowing the odds against us, and resolute to prevail no matter how long the struggle But no prudent statesman would then be a party to war if, without dishonour, it could be avoided The Prime Minister knew before he went to Berchtesgaden that settlement would mean the cession of the German-speaking districts of Czechoslovakia He knew that if war came the whole State would disappear before help could be made effective It was his belief, as it was of most friends of Czechoslovakia, that she would be wise to give up part in hope of keeping the remainder Hitler's declarations left no room for doubt that if the part were not voluntarily yielded the whole would be taken by force

At Berchtesgaden the Fuehrer's demands did not go beyond Sudeten self-determination (a principle he held in contempt except when it happened to serve his own purposes) This meant reference to the Cabinet and consultation with the French Government, but, in view of the conclusion to which Lord Runciman had been driven, there was no doubt of the result Chamberlain informed Hitler at Godesberg that the Berchtesgaden demand had been conceded not only by the British and French Governments but also by the Government of Czechoslovakia Hitler had got all he asked for, and it did not content him His armies were mobilised, and he wanted a military triumph The world must see a demonstration of German might, Czechoslovakia must not only lose territory but suffer humiliation

At this Chamberlain also showed his teeth Hitler's new demands were intolerable They could not be accepted For some days there was deadlock Mr Churchill said in the House of Commons that the difference between the Godesberg demands and the terms accepted at Munich was in substance small That

is true. But it was the difference between what the Czechs were then willing to accept and what they were not. It was the difference between peace and war. The problem was psychological. Mr Duff Cooper, who left the Government after Munich, told the House of Commons that in the Cabinet he accepted the principle of self-determination, knowing it meant the partition of Czechoslovakia. It was against Hitler's method of enforcing the transfer—against military invasion—that he revolted.

The reaction in French minds was the same. They could not get excited about Sudeten self-determination, except the Communists, all the French parties were more or less ready for that. At any rate, they were not inclined to go to war about it. But Hitler's demands at Godesberg were more than they could swallow. French opinion veered in favour of intervention, the Government, it was announced, was ready to stand by the Czechs, and they knew they could rely on the full support of Britain.

The invitation to Munich gave no hope that frontier changes would be avoided. Czechoslovakia would not be saved from partition. The Sudeten areas would go to Germany. The utmost possible gain was that the Godesberg terms would be so modified that the Czechs and their friends could accept them. A good deal was done in this way. In his resignation speech, Mr Duff Cooper referred to the "great and important" concession secured at Munich. Again, the difference was mainly psychological. The dictator scored another triumph. No democrat could do other than deplore the result. But was it an issue on which this country should have gone to war? That was the decisive question in the Parliamentary debates. Ought the Government to have broken off negotiations and appealed to the sword? Not one member was prepared to say "Yes" to that. In view of the public declarations of Arthur Henderson, Lloyd George, and Churchill on the dangers of including the Sudeten districts in Czechoslovakia there would have been no united British opinion for war to prevent their transfer to Germany.

All were against war on that issue. But the issue, they said, ought not to have arisen. It was the Government's fault. If our foreign policy had been directed with wisdom peace would have

been assured Then at what stage of the Czechoslovak controversy did they go wrong? Chamberlain's statement of policy on March 24 was generally approved So was Lord Runciman's mission of mediation, and it was not his fault or the fault of the Government that he failed Chamberlain's personal intervention later, and his three interviews with Hitler, were hailed with public acclaim in which all parties shared When the peace was saved at Munich joy was unrestrained As shown in an earlier chapter, the country's newspapers—of all parties—were all but unanimous in supporting the Government's action In the House of Commons, the Prime Minister's opponents gave him such warm compliments and thanks that the transition from praise to censure was for some of them an embarrassing operation

More and more, assailants of the Government drifted away from the Czechoslovak crisis to European politics and League of Nations policy in the years before The trouble had come, it was argued, and Czechoslovakia was robbed of territory, because the National Government had abandoned collective security, in other words, had failed to make full use of the League Attention has already been given in this survey to Italy's aggression on Abyssinia and to the fact that Britain was the one and only Power which was then ready to co-operate in enforcing League policy The bitterest opponent of the Government could not hold it responsible for French lukewarmness nor for the duplicity of Laval In the next dangerous emergency, the Civil War in Spain, it was plain that the League could not effectively intervene Nor could it deal with the case of Czechoslovakia Its inability was due to many causes, some inherent in the League system Of the Great Powers who were members Britain had consistently given it the most loyal support, and there was no warrant for the accusation that she "deserted" it or was responsible for its collapse Nor was there any credible evidence in support of the argument that the state of Europe in 1937 and 1938 was due to earlier British action or inaction at Geneva The logic of that stretches to the absurd and can be made to bring home to thus island the responsibility for Nazism and all the atrocities of Hitler

If, as I believe, this survey has been up to now a fair and true

account, how are we to account for the blizzard which, soon after Munich, smote the policy of "appeasement"? That was not the best word to describe the Government's purpose, but it is a good word and does not merit the obloquy into which it fell. By opponents of the Government it was misrepresented as a policy of concessions designed to placate Germany and Italy. The aim was the appeasement of *Europe*, and there could be no approach to that so long as a powerfully armed, vengeful Germany remained a menace to her neighbours. Appeasement was an essential instrument of policy for any Government whose aim was to establish peace. We have had years of war since, and who doubts now that it was a noble aim, or that peace was worth almost any price short of dishonour? The patience and persistence with which the policy was pursued, were not weakness but strength. Opinion in war may be a precious asset or a crippling burden. The world knew that the peace secured at Munich was due to Chamberlain's exertions, and when it was shattered less than a year later the world knew also that Britain entered the war free from any stain of blood-guiltiness.¹

But that was not in people's thoughts during the winter of 1938-9. Their sympathies were stirred by prostrate Czechoslovakia. Anger was fed by new outbreaks of Nazi savagery against the Jews. Every blatant speech by Hitler added fuel to the flames of British wrath. The people were now in no mood for appeasement. Chamberlain's patience had outlasted theirs, and a new note of resentment spread and deepened during these months. It was easy then to ridicule the declaration which the Prime Minister and the Fuehrer signed at Munich on the morning after the conference. Chamberlain was derided as much too simple and trusting for the grim realities of international politics.

But what happened in Munich that Friday morning? The Prime Minister talked peace to Hitler and found him also in a pacific mood. He might have said to the House of Commons on the following Monday "I had a very interesting conversation with the Fuehrer. He was ready to sign a declaration that Britain and Germany should never go to war again. He was ready, further, to affirm—and to sign the affirmation—that disputes

¹ Read, on this, a quotation from Mr Churchill, page 184.

between the two countries should be dealt with by the method of consultation and that we should try to remove the causes of difference in the interest of European peace. These are, of course, our own aims and I was tempted to bring back such a declaration, signed by both of us, but, having no wish to be further associated with Hitler, I let the opportunity pass." That is the sort of statement which, it is reasonable to infer, his critics would have welcomed. Or he might, with their approval, have adopted another formula. He might have said "Agreeing with this declaration I was glad of the opportunity to sign it. The Fuehrer also signed it, but I will not conceal from the House my opinion that his signature is entirely worthless."

In either form, such a report would have come within the logic of Chamberlain's assailants. Here is striking exemplification of one difficulty that accompanied him throughout his peace campaign. There could be no approach to success without negotiation with a man who was first disliked and then hated and loathed. Yet Hitler's infamies did not make it less desirable to use every means to avoid war with Germany if it could be done consistently with our honour and interests. On such a mission one could touch pitch and not be defiled. It was a condition of pursuit of the great prize that, so long as negotiation was desired by us, the British Prime Minister must eschew provocative words even about the Fuehrer. The result was that many people came to think of Chamberlain as pro-Hitler and to condemn him, not for his own actions, but for German policy which he had striven to reverse.

Up to and including the Munich Conference, the Government's policy received general support from Parliament and public. The settlement at Munich was welcomed with universal joy. Opinion was virtually unanimous that the issue then for the time decided was not one on which this country should have gone to war. Hitler respected no argument but force, and in that he temporarily possessed a vast superiority. He knew our weakness. He was aware of French hesitancy. He saw that the Anglo-French negotiators would not press objection to his measures to the point of war. That being so, he took what he wanted.

In his last book, *Between Two Wars*, J A Spender supports British policy at this time, but says its opponents were helped by the inadequacy of Chamberlain's exposition of it. He could not confess the deficiencies of British armaments, and it was difficult to make a good case for the Government without confessing them. "I can think," Mr Spender says, "of only one Conservative leader in recent times, Lord Balfour, who could have walked this razor's edge with comparative success." There were occasions when Balfour stayed on the razor's edge too long! Chamberlain had no gift for dialectical acrobatics, nor could he satisfy with a picture when facts must be withheld. Always he was hoping for close negotiation in which the way could be prepared for a broad-based European agreement, and he knew that negotiation would not be helped by prior controversy about details. The preliminary character of proposed conversations with Hitler and his colleagues, the further aim of a concordat between all the European Powers, the resolve to maintain the *entente* with France, the determination to strengthen the nation's defences while striving for peace—these and other elements of the British case were not often enough presented as connected parts of a great whole.

Most serious in its effects on opinion was the failure to inform the public as to the state of British armaments. To tell Parliament or public meetings was to tell Powers that might be our enemies. It could not be done in the two or three years immediately preceding the war. Frankness might have been exercised with less risk—indeed, with no risk worth setting against the possible gain—in the period immediately after Hitler's accession to power. It was then, as Mr Baldwin afterwards confessed, that rearmament would have begun had public support been assured. The heads of the Government appear to have been held back by a pacifist campaign in which, though British disarmament had been carried to the extreme, any suggestion of rearmament was branded as war-mongering. The Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, was not the man to deal with such a situation and procrastination continued for two or three years. Mr Churchill began to give a lead early in the 'thirties, but, to be frank, there is no political leader in this generation who entirely escapes blame for the

neglect to rearm in time. Not Conservatives, not Labourists, not Liberals. The Labour Party opposed all rearmament until the summer of 1937, and were still resisting Conscription only a few months before the war.

The position in the autumn of 1938 was much worse than people thought. It was more than two years since Parliament had sanctioned vast expenditure on armaments. But production on a great scale had scarcely begun. In the years of disarmament, munition works capacity was reduced to danger-point. New factories had to be built, filled with machinery, and powered. After years of Labour opposition to any rearmament, a large section of workers—whose output afterwards surpassed all expectation—did not welcome the Government's new demands upon them. Two years after announcement of the Government plans, production of many essential requirements was still a dribble.

It is sometimes said that the gain of a year at Munich gave us no advantage that German production over the whole range of munitions in 1938–9 was greater than ours, and no doubt it was. Their preparations were completed before ours began. But the objection misses the point. In some essential things, we had not got, in 1938, the barest minimum of military requirements. When war came a year later we were still at a big disadvantage, but the position was much better than in the autumn of 1938.

It would be untrue to say that British peace policy was dictated by the nation's unpreparedness for war. Though no pacifist, Chamberlain believed war would be a crime unless every honourable means had been used to avoid it. Those who saw much of him during his Premiership know that this conviction, and the duty it imposed, counted with him above all party or personal considerations. But he did not falter in those dark days of late September, 1938, when war appeared to be almost certain, even in our weakness the pledged word must be honoured.

The Government's policy brought us two immense gains: (1) a year that was most precious, and (2) the demonstration to the world for all time that Britain had striven to the utmost for peace. Our hands were clean.

TWO YEARS REVIEWED

Supplementing the above review, I give the following article which Lord Kemsley contributed to the *Sunday Times* on March 26, 1939, closely following Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia. The article was headed "The Government's Foreign Policy Before Munich and After."

I have read in some speeches and newspaper articles—and these, of course, are echoed in familiar talk—that responsibility for the present European crisis somehow rests on the British Government and particularly on the British Prime Minister. And, of course, if that were true the responsibility must be shared by all who have given whole-hearted support to the foreign policy associated with the name of Mr Chamberlain. I am one of these, not merely as a private citizen but as the head of the organization which includes many important newspapers in various parts of the country besides the *Sunday Times*. These newspapers have consistently supported the Government's policy throughout the crisis of last autumn, since then, and now.

In these recent days I have been reflecting on the events of the past two years and I have come to two conclusions: (1) That in the so-called policy of appeasement there is nothing to regret and much of which we may be proud, and (2) that though, through no fault of ours, it has not achieved its purpose in the case of Germany, yet it has given to this country a moral strength throughout the world that is and long will be of value incalculable.

I cast my mind back to the days in 1937, shortly after he succeeded to the Premiership, when Mr Chamberlain began his peace campaign. What did we think of it then? There was certainly no overweening confidence. From the first, it was a fight against heavy odds. But, though the word was often applied to the peace policy, it was not a gamble. It did not create new danger. The danger was there already. Europe was dividing into opposing ideological camps, the gulf between them was rapidly widening and deepening.

To let things drift was, almost certainly, to make war inevitable. There was no hope of peace except in patiently and persistently pursuing it. The prize was so infinitely precious that no humane statesman could, with due regard to

his country's honour and interests, leave anything undone that might help in winning it If the pursuit failed, if the prize eluded our grasp, we should, at any rate, be no worse off than before We are, indeed, far better off, for not only are the country's defences vastly stronger than they were two years ago, but there is the intangible, immeasurable asset of moral prestige to which reference has already been made

One other thing may be said If the Government had allowed things to drift and the drift had carried us into war, or to the edge of war, should we not have sadly asked then whether disaster—for, whatever the result, war is disaster—might not have been avoided if a resolute effort had been made to secure a peaceful and honourable settlement? And nobody could have answered that question with confidence if the effort had not been made

We who have supported the policy of appeasement have had no quarrel with either Italy or Germany because her political system differs from our own We are democrats The freedom of the individual, liberty limited only by the laws which the people, through their representatives, themselves make, are our most precious heritage But it is none of our business if in other countries different political systems are adopted, and we have never made that an excuse for not cultivating good relations with them

It has often been said that we carried forbearance much too far in our dealings with Herr Hitler's Government, and, indeed, it may be admitted that for no cause less than that of the world's peace could we have gone on in the face of such serious discouragements The annexation of Austria, the persecution of the Jews—each in turn exasperated and embittered public opinion and created an atmosphere in which negotiation between London and Berlin was for the time impossible Still we were ready, at the earliest opportunity, to go into conference in the hope of reaching agreements so comprehensive that confidence would be restored sufficiently to establish a new sense of security in Europe so that not only might peace be made safe but the wealth-destroying armaments race stopped It was the way of peace, and till it was tried none could be sure that success was unattainable

Then came the Czech crisis, German mobilisation, and those dreadful days in September when Europe was on the verge of war I, for one, cannot regret the part which our

country then played. Some people talk as if Germany's annexation of Czechoslovakia in the week before last was the result of Munich. Is it not almost certain that if there had been no Munich Conference, Czechoslovakia would have been annexed then? Though Sudetenland went to Germany, the rest of the country was saved and the loss of its independence in these recent days is due not to Munich, but to the dishonouring of Munich, to the duplicity of Herr Hitler in—suddenly and without any notice to his co-signatories—violating the treaty to which he had put his hand.

I am not impressed now by the taunt that Mr Chamberlain ought to have known that Hitler would be faithless. How could he have known? It is pertinent to point out that our most important agreement with Germany before Munich—the Naval Agreement—is believed to have been faithfully kept. But are peaceful settlements to be sought only when statesmen are perfectly sure beforehand that they will be attained? Was Europe to be plunged into war last autumn because of the possibility that the head of the German State would be false to his signature?

He had boasted that when he gave his word he kept it, and now he was putting his name to a document providing for the final settlement of the Czech frontiers. He said he had no further territorial claims. He insisted that he did not want non-Germans in the Reich. It was not only to Mr Chamberlain that these assurances were given; they were given also to M. Daladier and Signor Mussolini, the other signatories. If one was deceived, they all were—and not only they but the people of Germany, too.

The world is reduced to chaos if agreements are not made or are not kept when they are made. They are so necessary, indeed, that they cannot be refused because of mere suspicion that a signatory may not honour his engagement, though in such case the other signatories will, in common prudence, take measures to safeguard themselves against violation of the signed word. And that our Government did after Munich. Instead of slackening, rearmament was speeded up and expanded.

For one, I resent the imputation that any share of responsibility for the tearing up of the Munich Agreement can be placed on the British Government or on those who have supported its policy. Blame for wrongdoing attaches only to the

wrongdoer We had hoped and worked for appeasement, and, instead, there is new and brutal aggression The Government's prompt action in challenging this and in inviting other peace-loving nations to co-operate in any measures of resistance that are decided upon has evoked the sympathy and support of all parties in this country That was to be expected The Government has the country behind it as rarely before It is ready to answer every call for patriotic service What can be done should be announced at the earliest possible moment There can be no doubt either of the people's response, or that Europe will again be delivered from any menace of enslaving domination

CHAPTER XIX

Britain and Poland

THE SHOCK HAD BEEN TREMENDOUS, AND IT WAS SWIFTLY followed by a revolutionary change in British policy Hitler's annexation of Austria and of Sudetenland was mainly the absorption of Germans into the Reich He vowed often that that was all he wanted But now he had taken the land of millions of Slavs, and there were signs of coming aggression on other non-German peoples Hitler stood before the world a man forsown It was folly to think of negotiation with him on the assumption that he would keep word or bond As Chamberlain remarked to a friend, "If I got up in the House now and said Hitler had given me assurances, I should be covered with derision "

The situation in Europe was such that, to act effectively, we could not keep within the tradition and precedent of our foreign policy Mr Baldwin had said that the British frontier was on the Rhine It was common doctrine that we ought to be disinterested in the lands between there and the Balkans In Eastern Europe we must have no commitments But now, as related in Chapter XVII, we were incurring special obligations to Poland Within a fortnight of the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, the British Government, after consultation with French Ministers, were negotiating with the Poles The position

being regarded as one of imminent danger, Parliament was informed on March 31 that if Poland was attacked during negotiations and the Poles resisted with their national forces, we should at once give them all the support in our power France gave a similar undertaking

In a thousand years of history the Poles had suffered much from their neighbours Thrice had their country been partitioned between Russia, Prussia and Austria Their national independence, destroyed in 1795, was restored after the war of 1914-18 In the main the new State consisted of Polish-speaking provinces of Russia, Germany, and Austria, but there were large racial minorities East of Pomerania and west of Danzig the province of Pomorze stretched to the sea It was part of ancient Poland, its population was only to a small extent German and the Peace settlement in 1919 rightly included it in the new Polish State It separated East Prussia from the Reich, but railway travel was free from Customs or passport formalities and the Poles had suggested that road traffic should be given the same facilities The province of Pomorze had come to be labelled "the Corridor," and it was this and the status of Danzig which were Germany's main grievances against Poland

The population of Danzig was predominantly German But it was Polish overseas trade on which the city lived These two facts governed the settlement at Versailles Danzig was a free city for centuries, and so it was constituted afresh with a Senate through which it managed its own affairs The only qualification of this was that Polish Customs policy and regulations were applied and that Polish Customs officials were established in Danzig Without such protection Polish trade might have been strangled at its sea outlet

After years of close alliance with France, Poland deemed it prudent to cultivate good relations with Germany The ten years non-aggression agreement was signed in 1934, and, as recorded in a previous chapter, the German Foreign Minister, Ribbentrop, declared as recently as January 25, 1939, that a "final end" had been put to enmity between the two countries It was a fraudulent pretence an intensive campaign against Poland was already beginning The Nazification of Danzig went on apace in

January, and Jewish laws similar to those of Germany became operative in the Free City. In the same month a thousand Jewish residents were expelled. There were frequent quarrels about Customs. On February 27 it was officially stated in Warsaw that if order was not restored in Danzig Poland would be obliged to take "proper action." Consultation with the British and French Governments soon followed.

In both Houses of the British Parliament there was almost complete unity in support of the new policy of resistance to aggression. On April 3, Chamberlain described the Government's pledge to Poland as a tremendous departure from all precedent. Britain "has been united from end to end by the conviction that we must now make our position clear and unmistakable, whatever may be the result." In the discussions taking place with some other Governments there was "no threat to Germany, so long as Germany will be a good neighbour." We were concerned not only for our own independence, but for the independence of all States which were threatened by aggression. In resistance to that "we welcome the co-operation of any country, whatever may be its internal system of government."

The Prime Minister's statement was greeted with approval in all parts of the House. Mr Eden, Sir Archibald Sinclair, and Mr Churchill declared their agreement with it. The Government, Mr Eden said, had taken the only way to maintain peace, and the Prime Minister's speech exactly interpreted the feeling of the nation.

Ten days later, on April 13, Chamberlain denounced Italy's invasion of Albania. "Public opinion throughout the world," he declared, "has once again been profoundly shocked by this fresh exhibition of the use of force." The British Government attached the greatest importance to the avoidance of disturbance, by force or threats of force, of the *status quo* in the Mediterranean and the Balkan Peninsula. They had, therefore, decided that

In the event of any action being taken which clearly threatened the independence of Greece or Rumania, and which the Greek or Rumanian Government considered it vital to resist with their national forces, His Majesty's Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Greek

or Rumanian Government, as the case might be, all the support in their power

Hitler's reply to British diplomatic activity was to denounce the 1935 naval agreement with Britain¹ He announced this in a speech to the Reichstag on April 28 It was then also that he gave his first public exhibition of the new hostility to Poland In the previous month, only a week after the German occupation of Prague, Ribbentrop told the Polish Ambassador in Berlin that there must be a quick settlement about Danzig He demanded the transfer of Danzig to the Reich, and to Germany should also be given a road and railway route with extra-territorial rights through "the Corridor" In return for this, Ribbentrop offered a twenty-five years' pact of non-aggression, and recognition of existing German-Polish boundaries as permanent There was already a non-aggression agreement between the two countries And Poland was not prepared to make her established boundaries a bargaining counter Five days later, on March 26, she made counter-proposals which included a joint guarantee by Germany and Poland of Danzig's freedom and an offer of "the most liberal treatment possible" of German wishes in regard to the "Corridor" On these matters the Polish Government desired further exchange of views This was interpreted in Berlin as a rejection of the German proposals and a refusal of "friendly discussions" In the Reichstag speech of April 28, Hitler put his proposals in the form of public demands and, at the same time, denounced the non-aggression agreement of 1935

A fortnight earlier President Roosevelt had interposed with an unconventional and direct challenge to Hitler and Mussolini It took the form of a personal appeal to them to give a long-term guarantee that they would not invade thirty named countries They had repeatedly declared that they had no desire for war "If this is true," the President said, "there need be no war" Let specific undertakings be given

Are you willing to give assurances that your armed forces will not attack or invade the territory or possessions of the

¹ The narrative that follows is based largely on the British Government's publication, *Documents Concerning German-Polish Relations and the Outbreak of Hostilities Between Great Britain and Germany on September 3, 1939*

following independent nations Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Great Britain and Eire, France, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Luxemburg, Poland, Hungary, Roumania, Yugoslavia, Russia, Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, Iraq, the Arabias, Syria, Egypt and Iran?

Such an assurance clearly must apply not only to the present day but also to a future sufficiently long to give every opportunity to work by peaceful methods for a more permanent peace I, therefore, suggest that you construe the word "future" to apply to a minimum period of assured non-aggression—ten years at least, a quarter of a century if we dare look that far ahead.

I hope that your answer will make it possible for humanity to lose fear and regain security for many years to come

The British and French and Russian Governments welcomed the President's appeal Hitler's reply put the chief blame for world unrest on the Press If Governments and newspapers acted with restraint the fear of war would disappear at once As for the States named by Mr Roosevelt, he was willing to give them a guarantee if it was asked for with appropriate proposals All the thirty of them were to beg him for immunity from attack and were told in advance that they must submit terms which he would deem "appropriate"!

The very serious obligations they had incurred to Poland, Rumania, and Greece, compelled the British Government to reconsider the country's military resources It had already been decided to double the strength of the Territorials Except in time of war, conscription had never been adopted in this country Chamberlain, and Baldwin before him, had given pledges that there would be no compulsory military service in time of peace The Prime Minister and the Cabinet now decided that, with due regard to the nation's safety and the fulfilment of its obligations, that position could no longer be maintained Accordingly, on April 26, Chamberlain presented to the House of Commons a plan for compulsory service It was justified by the special circumstances of the time and was not intended to be a permanent change of policy

This notwithstanding, both the Opposition parties were

strongly hostile to the proposal. A Labour vote of no confidence in the Government was moved by Mr Attlee who stressed the Labour Party's concern lest the country should drift into industrial conscription. Sir Archibald Sinclair, for the Opposition Liberals, joined in the attack on the Government. Assailed for abandoning his pledges, the Prime Minister simply replied that he had changed his mind under pressure of events—what Mr Churchill called our “tremendous and staggering” new commitments on the Continent. In spite of this, 143 Opposition members went into the lobby against the Government's proposal which was, however, approved by a majority of 237. French Labour could not understand the attitude of Mr Attlee and his followers. In an article in *Le Populaire* on April 28, M Blum, the Socialist leader, said:

Our Socialist friends in England have reproached, and continue to reproach, Mr Chamberlain's Government for its weakness towards the Dictators, its spirit of compromise and its lack of determination and energy. The Opposition complains that the Government is not doing enough to protect nations threatened with attack, and to defend peace. I am, therefore, shocked, and I believe so is the whole of French opinion, at the inexplicable contradiction between the Labour party's political opposition to the Government and its opposition to conscription.

In May an agreement was signed between Britain and Rumania, giving that country a credit of £5,000,000, and an undertaking to buy 200,000 tons of her wheat crop. The British and Turkish Governments concluded “A definite long-term agreement of a reciprocal character in the interests of their national security.” The value of these compacts, and that with Poland, would obviously be increased if we established a good understanding with the Soviet Government. Anglo-French negotiations to secure this went on during the summer. One difficulty was that the Poles and the Rumanians, while anxious for the strongest insurance against German aggression, had deep-rooted suspicions of Russia. Another was the Russian desire that we should recognise their annexation of three Baltic republics—Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. Our policy being

the support of small nations against aggression this was very embarrassing, and the negotiations moved slowly. On May 24 Chamberlain informed the House of Commons that he hoped for early and full agreement between the three Powers. Our Cabinet agreed to a plan for concerted action at once if any of them was attacked or in case of aggression against certain other Powers. On May 31, M. Molotov (who had succeeded M. Litvinov as Foreign Minister at the beginning of the month) issued a statement in which he set out Russia's minimum conditions for "an effective pact of mutual assistance against aggression" with Great Britain and France. The conditions included these

A guarantee against attack by aggressors on the part of Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union to the States of Central and Eastern Europe, including all the European countries bordering on the Soviet Union, without exception.

The conclusion of a concrete agreement by Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union regarding the forms and the extent of the immediate and effective assistance to be given to each other and to the guaranteed States in the event of an attack by the aggressors.

There was conditional agreement as to those two paragraphs, and the condition was bluntly put by M. Molotov when he said the Soviet Union could not assume obligations in regard to the countries which Britain and France had guaranteed unless it received a guarantee for the three countries on its north-west frontier—Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. That was how matters stood at the end of May. Britain and France greatly desired agreement but felt that recognition of Russian sovereignty over the three Baltic States would compromise their moral position as champions of small States.

In spite of this, and of non-aggression pacts between Germany and Latvia, and Germany and Estonia, there was still good hope that an agreement would be concluded. But it was noticed in Berlin that informed Germans were cheerful about Russia. M. Molotov had mentioned that trade relations with Germany might be improved. We soon knew that more than that was being considered. Hitler was already expectant that his nightmare of war on two fronts would be avoided. He was further encouraged

by British difficulties in the Far East. A tense situation had been created by the Japanese blockade of the British Concession at Tientsin. The ostensible cause of the blockade was the shelter given by the Concession authorities to four Chinese against whom the Japanese had made a murder charge which was believed to be groundless. But this was not the real cause of the blockade. Japanese army leaders at Tientsin, supported by Tokio, were insisting that the British must, in effect, support the New Order in China. This we could not possibly do. If the issue were pressed we should be bound to resist. There was a good deal of talk about economic pressure against Japan—"sanctions"—but the Cabinet had no faith in such action unless it was accompanied by other measures. All through the summer there was grave risk of war. The Japanese were exploiting our commitments in Europe, and, of course, Hitler was exploiting our embarrassments in the Far East.

His quest for new allies had little success. Denmark's geographical position compelled her to accept the offer of a non-aggression pact, but Norway, Sweden, and Finland refused it. There were German complaints that British policy aimed at the encirclement of Germany. To this Chamberlain replied in a speech at Cardiff on June 24:

The German people are being drenched day and night with assertions that Britain is planning to encircle them, and encirclement, they are told, means the denial to them of the natural and legitimate expansion of their trade, and the exercise of a gradually increasing economic pressure designed to lower their standards of life till they are finally crushed and helpless.

What a grotesque travesty of the attitude of this country! The aim of our foreign policy is now, as always, to establish a peaceful world, where each nation can pursue its occupations in security and confidence. In a world in which confidence was restored, Britain and Germany could well co-operate in developing resources which still lay latent, and which would bring in returns of solid value to both. But such a happy future must remain a dream until Germany is ready to drop her unjust suspicions.

Lord Halifax made a notable speech on the same subject at the

annual dinner of the Royal Institute of Foreign Affairs on June 29. We had assumed new obligations, and were preparing to assume more, with full understanding of their causes and consequences.

If the security and independence of other countries are to disappear, our own security and our own independence will be gravely threatened. If international law and order is to be preserved we must be prepared to fight in its defence. We have always stood out against the attempt by any single Power to dominate Europe at the expense of the liberty of other nations, and British policy is only following the inevitable line of its own history if such an attempt were to be made again.

We are told that our motives are to isolate Germany within a ring of hostile States, to stifle her natural outlets, to cramp and throttle the existence of a great nation. The fact is that Germany is completely isolating herself—economically, politically, and culturally. It depends on the German Government alone whether this process of isolation continue or not, for any day it can be ended by a policy of co-operation.

It is impossible to negotiate with a Government whose responsible spokesmen brand a friendly country as thieves and blackmailers and indulge in daily monstrous slanders on British policy. The threat of military force is holding the world to ransom, and our immediate task is to resist aggression. I would emphasise that with all the strength at my command, so that nobody may misunderstand it.

On this policy, so firmly expounded by the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, the nation was united. "One sure indication that the Government's foreign policy now commands the support of all parties," wrote the Political Correspondent of the *Sunday Times* (July 2) "is the absence of any demand for debating it in the House of Commons. Foreign affairs which, during most of the session took up a large part of the time of the House, are in these days mentioned only at question time."

On July 10, Chamberlain defined the British attitude to the Danzig problem, then becoming critical. "We have," he said, "guaranteed to give our assistance to Poland in the case of a clear threat to her independence which she considers it vital to resist by her national forces, and we are firmly resolved to carry

out this undertaking" In spite of repeated declarations to that effect, the Germans professed incredulity Herr Hitler, it was said by an Under-Secretary of their Foreign Office, was convinced that England would never fight over Danzig Upon this, Sir Nevile Henderson called on State Secretary Weiszacker on July 14, and talked very plainly to him

If Hitler wanted war it was very simple He had only to tell the Danzigers to proclaim the reattachment of the Free City to Germany Obviously that would put the onus of action on the Poles, but not even that would cause us to hesitate to support them if Germany attacked them, since we would realise quite well that the Senate at Danzig would only adopt such a resolution on the direct order of the Chancellor

His Majesty's Government could never be reproached this time, as they had been in 1914, for not having made their position clear beyond all doubt

Reviewing the situation at the end of June, Mr Churchill compared it with the position at the same time in the year before Then we had no treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia, now we had given an absolute guarantee to Poland If the Polish Government did not yield to German demands we should have no way of retreat The decision for peace or war rested with one man—Hitler

Mr Churchill added his own warning to those addressed to the Fuehrer by the British Government "Pause and consider," he said, "before you take the plunge into the terrible unknown where your life's work in raising Germany from defeat to a point where all the world is waiting anxiously upon her actions, may not be irretrievably cast aside I wish I could convince Herr Hitler of the fact that the British nation—and surely also the British Empire—has reached the limit of its patience"

Despite all warnings, many Germans clung to the view that as the crisis neared its climax, Britain would find a way of escape from her commitment to Poland

CHAPTER XX

Russo-German Agreement

DANGER OF A GERMAN ATTACK ON POLAND HAD BEEN acute ever since Hitler's demand in March for the incorporation of the Free City of Danzig in the Reich and for a railway and road route with extra-territorial rights across the Polish province of Pomorze (the "Corridor") Applying his usual tactics he tried thereafter to cover up his tracks Suspicions must be allayed, fears diminished, if the planned crashing attack was to have the maximum effect of alarm and intimidation in Europe So, until August, the German Government did not openly intervene between Poland and the Senate of Danzig All through the summer, the city was being made a place of arms Military forces in various guises surreptitiously arrived there Munitions were stored Defences were constructed Where these preparations could not be concealed they were represented as the free acts of the Danzig authorities, though it was certain the Senate would not take such measures except on instructions from Hitler Any expressions of alarm were pooh-poohed in Berlin Indeed, in July, Gauleiter Forster, after being received by Hitler, told the League's High Commissioner that the question of Danzig and the Corridor could wait, it might be till the spring of 1940—or even longer Yet there can be no doubt that war had then been resolved upon and the approximate date for its beginning fixed If the feelings of Danzig Germans could meantime be so worked upon that a *fait accompli* was brought about and Poland manœuvred into a declaration of war, so much the better It would be a fine dramatic move if Hitler could appeal to the world as a victim of aggression!

So, while leaving Poland in no doubt about British support, Lord Halifax counselled caution at Warsaw The advice was taken in good part, indeed, the Poles were too near the lion's mouth to give the beast needless provocation But they kept their courage and their dignity On August 4 some Polish Customs inspectors at Danzig were informed that the Senate

would not allow them to continue to perform their duties. The Polish Commissioner-General in Danzig was thereupon instructed to warn the Senate that if this were persisted in the Polish Government would react in the strongest manner. The Senate appealed to Hitler and it was then for the first time, that the German Government officially and openly joined in the Danzig dispute. On August 9 the Polish Chargé d'Affaires in Berlin received from the State Secretary a threatening Note. It said that repetition of the Polish "demands" on Danzig—the "demands" did not go beyond the maintenance of established legal practice—"would lead to an aggravation of Polish-German relations." Complaint was made that the Poles were seeking to prevent export of certain Danzig goods to Poland. "If this were persisted in, Danzig would have no choice but to seek other opportunities of exporting and consequently, also, of importing goods." The implied threat to existing Customs arrangements was unmistakable.

The Poles made a firm reply. They would not recognise any juridical authority for the German intervention.

If exchange of views regarding the Danzig problem have taken place between the Polish Government and German Government, these exchanges were solely based on goodwill of Polish Government and arose from no obligation of any sort.

In reply to above-mentioned declaration of the German Government, the Polish Government are obliged to warn the German Government that in future, as hitherto, they will react to any attempt by authorities of the Free City which might tend to compromise the rights and interests which Poland possesses there in virtue of her agreements, by employment of such means and measures as they alone shall think fit to adopt, and will consider any future intervention by German Government to detriment of these rights and interests as an act of aggression.

On August 15, State Secretary Weizsäcker told Sir Nevile Henderson that the situation had "very gravely deteriorated," and it was now "most urgent." In one respect, it was even worse than in 1938, "as Mr Chamberlain could not again come out to Germany." Nor could Germany take an initiative for peace.

His Government, he said, "did not, would not and could not believe that Britain would fight under all circumstances, whatever folly the Poles might commit" On this the British Ambassador made this comment

I told Baron Weizsacker that this last was a very dangerous theory and sounded like Herr von Ribbentrop who had never been able to understand the British mentality If the Poles were compelled by any act of Germany to resort to arms to defend themselves there was not a shadow of doubt that we would give them our full armed support We had made that abundantly clear and Germany would be making a tragic mistake if she imagined the contrary

Weizsacker "seemed very confident and professed to believe that Russian assistance to the Poles would not only be entirely negligible but that the U S S R would in the end even join in sharing in the Polish spoils"

Parliament adjourned on August 2, for two months The usual provision was made for emergency meetings and few thought the holiday would be uninterrupted Members were anxious about the Russian negotiations The latest information before they dispersed was that the Soviet Government had intimated that military conversations would be helpful and that British and French Staff officers were already on the way to Moscow To have military talks before political agreements were reached was, at any rate, unconventional, and it may be assumed that neither side then gave away any important secrets Russo-German trade negotiations were proceeding, and on August 20 it was announced in Berlin that agreement had been reached This granted trade credit to the Soviet Government to buy German goods, and there was expectation of larger Russian exports to Germany

But this was not all The next day brought the news that Russia and Germany had made a non-aggression pact The text of it was published It put each Power in a state of friendly neutrality towards the other Neither would attack the other, neither would in any way support attack by a third Power They would remain in consultation on matters of common interest Differences arising between them would be solved by friendly

exchange of views or by arbitration. The agreement was for ten years certain, and unless one of the parties gave notice to terminate it, the period would be extended to fifteen years.

On both sides it was an amazing somersault. Throughout his career, Hitler had loathed Communist Russia. She was the untouchable. Nothing but desperate need would have driven him into association with her. There is every reason to believe that his hatred was reciprocated. This non-aggression pact will be one of the classic examples in history of peace on the lips and none in the heart. Even when the agreement was being signed Hitler probably intended the treacherous sudden attack which came less than two years after Russia? Well, she was unready for war and, in her own fashion, she practised "appeasement."

The world regarded the agreement as a triumph for German diplomacy. For a time, at any rate, Hitler had prevented the war on two fronts that he dreaded. The new trading arrangements, moreover, might be expected to bring Germany substantial supplies of food and raw materials. From the Baltic to the Black Sea there could be no blockade. Could Britain and France persist in their guarantees of Polish integrity now Russian support was not available? German propaganda answered the question in the negative. But the fiction was soon dispelled.

It was true, as State Secretary Weizsäcker said, that Chamberlain could not again go to Germany. But he had something of importance to say to Hitler, and said it in a letter to him sent through the Ambassador in Berlin.

Whatever may prove to be the nature of the German-Soviet agreement, it cannot alter Great Britain's obligation to Poland which His Majesty's Government have stated in public repeatedly and plainly and which they are determined to fulfil.

It has been alleged that, if His Majesty's Government had made their position more clear in 1914, the great catastrophe would have been avoided. Whether or not there is any force in the allegation, His Majesty's Government are resolved that on this occasion there shall be no such tragic misunderstanding.

If the case should arise, they are resolved, and prepared, to employ without delay all the forces at their command, and it is impossible to foresee the end of hostilities once engaged. It would be a dangerous illusion to think that, if war once

starts it will come to an early end, even if a success on any one of the several fronts on which it will be engaged should have been secured

Having thus clearly defined the British position, the Prime Minister told the Fuehrer that war would be the greatest calamity that could occur, that the questions at issue between Germany and Poland ought to be settled without the use of force, and by direct negotiation between the two Governments. In this and, if it were possible, in wider discussions about the future of international relations, the British Government would always be willing to assist.

When Sir Nevile Henderson delivered this letter at Berchtesgaden he found Hitler excitable and angry about British support of the Poles. Told by the Ambassador that direct action by Germany would mean war, Hitler replied that Germany had nothing to lose and Britain much, that he did not desire war but would not shrink from it if it was necessary, and that his people were much more behind him than last September. Later in the day, when the Ambassador saw him again, he repeatedly declared that it was "all England's fault." He said he was fifty years old and he preferred war now to when he was fifty-five or sixty.

The Fuehrer's reply to the Prime Minister consisted in large part of confused generalities. He declared that the British promise of support had encouraged the Poles to "unloose a wave of appalling terrorism" against the Germans living in Poland. The Government of the Reich would not tolerate "the extermination of the Free City of Danzig by economic measures." If Britain and France carried out the measures of mobilisation of which he had received information, it would be against Germany and when they took effect he would order immediate mobilisation of the German forces.

German mobilisation was already a fact, and it was not restricted to the military services. The newspapers, which in Germany are under the orders of State officials, were let loose in an atrocity campaign alarmingly similar to that directed against the Czechs a year before. Stories, however false, which were printed in all the papers, continued day after day and never contradicted or corrected, were naturally believed. This

poisoning of the wells of knowledge was a normal part of Nazi administration About internal affairs the people could not be completely misled for many had first-hand knowledge, but news from abroad could be suppressed or so distorted as to convey a false meaning Attempts to break down the barriers against undoctored news all failed German newspapers were allowed to print only what the Nazi bosses permitted Lord Kemsley contributes the following very interesting account of his own effort to lift the embargo

In May 1939 my attention was directed to a challenge by Dr Dietrich which, it seemed to me, ought to be accepted Dr Dietrich was the official head of the German press He said he had offered to the publisher of an important group of American papers to place the whole German press at his disposal for an article by an American publicist in return for an article about Germany to be inserted in the papers of the American group

This interested me very much The European position was getting worse Germany appeared to be heading for war I had often reflected on the danger to peace which arose out of the ignorance of the German people about foreign affairs While a free news supply was not permitted and the newspapers were tuned by the Government it was easy to persuade the people that an aggressive war was really a war of defence forced on them by foreign enemies Whatever the purpose of Dr Dietrich's offer it was worth accepting, were it only for one exchange of articles—and there was the possibility that once done it might be repeated For us there would probably be no new information about German aims, but it was clearly in our interests to have published in all German papers a simple straightforward statement of British policy

For these reasons I informed Dr Dietrich that I was willing to accept the terms he had offered to the American publisher A statement of German policy would be inserted in all the papers under my control, and he would print a British article in all German papers In a few days he agreed The exchange of articles, he said, "must be a positive contribution to peaceful understanding between the two peoples" As that was my only purpose it seemed a good beginning

In July Dr Dietrich invited Lady Kemsley and myself to visit Germany (I informed the Government of this and of all

later developments) We arrived in Berlin on Tuesday, July 25 and dined with the British Ambassador that night.

German political leaders were at Bayreuth, where the Fuehrer also was, and there I was invited to go. We motored there on the following day and were the guests at dinner of the Gauleiter of the province. Next morning I had an hour's talk with Dr Dietrich. I made it plain that my only purpose in Germany was to complete the arrangements for the exchange of articles, but the Germans appeared to read more into my visit and at noon I was taken to see the Fuehrer. Our conversation, which was carried on through an interpreter, lasted more than an hour.

Hitler discussed the European position. He said he had never been anything but friendly towards Britain, but Germany was prepared for whatever might happen. In September, he told me, she would have two million men mobilised, and a very large air force. On this I reminded him of Britain's huge expenditure on rearmament. Hitler retorted that he thought Germany would win the next war but that he was sure I thought Britain would win. Whichever won, he added, there would be no real victory, and both would be so weakened as to give an excellent opportunity to Russia.

I told the Fuehrer that no section of the British people wanted to attack his country but that if Germany threatened world security and the Prime Minister declared in the House of Commons that it had been decided to declare war on her the whole House would rise in support of him. The British people were prepared to make any sacrifice for their country.

When I mentioned Czechoslovakia, Hitler said it was impossible to allow that country to be a spearhead pointed at the heart of Germany. Britain's attitude to Poland was very unfair and unreasonable. He further said it was ludicrous that such a great country as Germany, with its 80,000,000 people should have no colonies. The Versailles Treaty would have to be cancelled.

In the afternoon, during an interval of the performance of *Parsifal* we had another meeting with Hitler, but there was no reference then to public matters.

To other German leaders I spoke frankly about the British position. I said to Rosenberg "If there is conflict between our country and Germany, sooner or later America will be fighting on our side."

I was rather surprised to hear from Dr Dietrich before leaving Bayreuth that in his opinion the time was not opportune for the proposed exchange of articles. It should be deferred, he said, till there was some hope of *rapprochement* between the two countries. I did not agree and urged that articles which would strengthen the influences for peace could not be published too soon.

To prevent any possible misunderstanding, I wrote to Dr Dietrich from London on August 1 reminding him that in my conversations with the Fuehrer and others in Germany, I laid emphasis on the wholehearted support which was being given in this country to the Prime Minister's policy. While looking forward to negotiations which would place peace on a firm foundation, Britain would resist further attempts to impose unilateral changes in Europe by force. All sections of British opinion supported the Government on that.

"I am not sure," I added, "how far I succeeded in conveying to the Fuehrer that the British people, although they would like to arrive at an understanding with Germany, have had their confidence so shaken that discussions with that object in view do not seem to be feasible in present circumstances. I realise that the Fuehrer (and you too) don't consider that there is any justification for this attitude of our people. I don't want to argue that now, but it is very important and, indeed, essential that the facts should be known by the Fuehrer, and there is no question whatever as to the fact that confidence here does not at the moment exist."

Although Dr Dietrich had said on July 27 that the exchange of articles should be put off till relations were better, he sent me the German article on August 21—when relations were very much worse. Dr Hesse, German press attaché in London, called on me with the suggestion from Dr Dietrich that the German article might be printed before the British article was delivered! Of course I could not consent to that. The article was commonplace propaganda, not worth printing.

In view of what Dr Dietrich said to me at Bayreuth, the British article had not been sent to him. It had been prepared with great care, and pains were taken to make it a completely accurate statement of British policy. At this and every other stage of these proceedings the Government were fully informed of what I was doing.

Six months later, on February 6, 1940, I referred to this

episode in a broadcast to the Empire. It was evident, I said, that while our negotiations were going on Dr Dietrich must have known that the invasion of Poland was already planned and that a true statement of British policy would not be allowed to appear in the German press. German policy meant war and they dare not let their people know the truth.

Three weeks later (on February 29) Dr Dietrich, in the *Berliner Zeitung am Mittag*, paid me his compliments on my broadcast. He spoke of my "hypocritical distortions" and "typical English two-facedness", and of "infamous English lying methods". There was also a reference to "The English cobra".

It was not for me to reply to the German's vulgar abuse. In all these proceedings I had no other purpose than to serve the interests of my country.

Lord Kemsley's very interesting narrative confirms and extends the lesson taught by our Government's dealings with Hitler. It was a patriotic service to take up Dietrich's challenge and do his utmost to secure an exchange of articles between British and German newspapers. If the project had been carried through in favourable circumstances, it might have had most valuable results. But it is impossible to believe now that Dietrich had any intention of carrying it out. Like Hitler, he talked peace when, as Lord Kemsley says, he knew the invasion of Poland was already decided on. It is well to put this German duplicity on permanent record.

All this time the German papers were stirring up hatred against the Poles. Some of the Polish journals hit back but the Warsaw Government remained calm and was ready to proceed with negotiations with the Danzig Senate that had already begun. Hitler did not want negotiations, and his agents controlled the Senate. On August 23 Gauleiter Forster was proclaimed head of the State. The Polish Government declared this action to be outside the constitution of the Free City, and again protested against a policy of *fait accompli*.

On the day after the Senate's provocative act, the British Parliament held an emergency meeting. "We find ourselves confronted with the imminent peril of war," said the Prime Minister. He re-stated the Government's—and the nation's—

policy, their profound desire for peace and their resolve to resist aggression Lord Halifax addressed the Peers to the same effect In both Houses there was a most impressive unity No aspect of the tragic situation stirred profounder emotions than the threat to liberty, eloquently defined by the Foreign Secretary

There are some who say that the fate of European nations is no concern of ours, and that we should not look far beyond our own frontiers But those who thus argue forget, I think, that in failing to uphold the liberties of others we run great risk of betraying the principle of liberty itself and with it our own freedom and independence

We have built up a society with values which are accepted not only in this country but over vast areas of the world If we stand by and see these values set at nought, the security of all those things on which life depends seems, to my judgment, to be undermined, and that is a fundamental matter on which I scarcely think that there will be any difference of opinion

No issue ever before presented to Parliament had so united all sections of the two Houses and of the people Though ready to fight if need be, their desire for peace was shown by the grateful welcome given here to powerful warnings against war from various parts of the world President Roosevelt, on August 24, urged the Governments of Germany and Poland to settle their differences by direct negotiation, arbitration, or conciliation A day later he was able to tell Hitler that President Moscicki had informed him of the Polish Government's willingness to accept either the first method suggested or the third On August 23 the King of the Belgians made a fervent appeal for peace on behalf of the heads of State of the Oslo Group of Powers—Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, Norway, Holland, and Sweden (Later, on August 28, Queen Wilhelmina and King Leopold made a joint offer of mediation) The Pope, on August 24, broadcast a moving appeal for peace

Impressed, it may be, by these demonstrations of world opinion, Hitler sent for Sir Nevile Henderson on August 25, and gave to him a written statement with which he asked him to fly to London In this, while there was no weakening of the demands

on Poland, he made a naive statement of his benevolent attitude towards Great Britain "He accepts the British Empire, and is ready to pledge himself personally for its continued existence and to place the powers of the German Reich at its disposal if his colonial demands, which are limited, and can be negotiated by peaceful methods, are fulfilled, and in this case he is prepared to fix the longest possible time-limit" This would create a new political situation and the Fuehrer would then be ready for "a reasonable limitation of armaments" He was not interested in the problems of Western Europe, and had no thought of frontier modifications there And it was "the irrevocable determination of Germany never again to enter into conflict with Russia"

In the closing paragraph of this involved statement, Hitler said he was making his "last offer", and then he added that "immediately after solution of the German-Polish question he would approach the British Government with an offer" Nothing he could promise would be quite so alluring as the prospect he opened out to the Ambassador He said "he was by nature an artist, not a politician, and that once the Polish question was settled he would end his life as an artist and not as a war-monger"

The British Government welcomed the Fuehrer's proposal of discussion of differences with this country, but a Polish settlement must come first

The German Government will be aware that His Majesty's Government have obligations to Poland by which they are bound and which they intend to honour They could not, for any advantage offered to Great Britain, acquiesce in a settlement which put in jeopardy the independence of a State to whom they have given their guarantee

The right method was direct discussion between the German and Polish Governments on a basis which would safeguard Poland's essential interests and the securing of a settlement by international guarantee The Fuehrer was at the same time informed that the Poles were ready for such discussion World peace might in this way be secured Failure to reach a just settlement would bring Germany and Britain into conflict and

"might well plunge the whole world into war. Such an outcome would be a calamity without parallel in history."

To this calamity events were being rushed. Atrocity-mongering and press incitement to hatred of the Poles were intensified. The Danzig politicians were increasingly provocative. It was the same technique as that used against the Czechs, and Hitler reacted to it in the same way: the position had become intolerable, Germans must be protected against merciless attacks, and so on. War was becoming inevitable. The Poles were gathering their forces to resist attack, Britain and France were hastening their preparations. The British Navy was in a favourable position, as the result of calling up the Reserve Fleet for combined Fleet and Air exercises. The whole of our fighting strength at sea was ready for whatever dispositions were thought necessary.

The Prime Minister reviewed the progress of our preparations in the House of Commons on August 29. He did not, of course, call attention to the weaknesses in our war organisation and equipment, though these were known to many. We were much stronger than a year before, but a large part of the rearmament plans were still in the preparatory stage and it would be years before production reached its peak. The country was united, all parties vied in patriotic zeal and national service.

CHAPTER XXI

War

THE INTERVAL BETWEEN THE SIGNING OF THE RUSSO-German non-aggression agreement and the invasion of Poland was only ten days. Hitler's activities during that period leave no room for doubt that it was he who made the war. The Poles wished to negotiate, he would not consent. At the end, he pretended that they had disregarded his demands within the time set, but the time limit was an impossible one, and he took pains to prevent them knowing what the demands were.

His latest attempt to drive a wedge between the British and the Poles was recorded in the previous chapter. He may have thought that his new agreement with Russia would make it easy to seduce the Chamberlain Cabinet. But he was also playing for time. When Sir Nevile Henderson flew from Berlin to London on Friday, August 25, with the bids offered that morning, Hitler suggested to him that they should be carefully considered and that his return need not be hurried—this at a time when German war preparations were being rushed forward with the utmost speed. The Ambassador was back with the British reply on the Sunday. There was no weakening. As Chamberlain said in the House of Commons next day:

The British people are said sometimes to be slow to make up their minds, but, having made them up, they do not readily let go. The issue of peace or war is still undecided, and we still will hope, and still will work for peace, but we will abate no jot of our resolution to hold fast to the line which we have laid down for ourselves.

On Tuesday night, August 29, Hitler handed to Sir Nevile Henderson another message for London. In this he abused the Poles and used honeyed words of the British. Though expecting no good from it, he agreed to direct negotiation with the Polish Government—this “as a proof of the sincerity of Germany’s intentions to enter into a lasting friendship with Great Britain.” There was a warning that in the event of a territorial rearrangement in Poland Russia would have to be associated with any guarantees which Germany might give. But “the German Government had never had any intention of touching Poland’s vital interests or questioning the existence of an independent Polish State.”

Hitler’s “direct negotiation” promise was a mockery. The British Government was asked to use its good offices in securing the dispatch to Berlin of “a Polish emissary with full powers.” He was to arrive in Berlin on the following day, Wednesday. There was no information as to the proposals then to be discussed. The pretence that they had not yet been drafted was no doubt an excuse for not disclosing them. The Poles were to send a plenipotentiary to decide on terms which were unknown and

which would not be communicated beforehand to their Government British Ministers could not advise them to agree to such procedure The right course, as Lord Halifax telegraphed to Berlin, was for the German Government to hand their proposals to the Polish Ambassador for transmission to Warsaw They could then be considered before discussion in Berlin The Poles were entitled to so much courtesy and consideration But Hitler had no further use for courtesy What he wanted was to bully Colonel Beck as he had bullied Schuschnigg and Hacha

It was midnight on Wednesday, August 30, when Sir Nevile Henderson gave to Ribbentrop the British reply to Hitler's message of the night before The reply assumed that direct negotiation was still intended and that the necessary arrangements would be made between Berlin and Warsaw, suggested an undertaking by both parties that no aggressive military movements should take place during discussion, and, further, that to prevent the occurrence of incidents a temporary *modus vivendi* should be arranged for Danzig The Ambassador's communication led to a scene which he described in a letter written the next morning to Lord Halifax

Ribbentrop produced a long document containing terms for Poland which he read at top speed in German When the Ambassador asked for a copy of it he was told that his request was too late as the Polish representative had not arrived in Berlin by midnight Then, said Sir Nevile, the request that a Polish representative should arrive on August 30 was an ultimatum, though Hitler had denied it the day before Ribbentrop repeated the denial Then why not give a copy of the proposals to the Polish Ambassador, M Lipski, for submission to his Government? To this, Ribbentrop replied violently that he would never ask the Ambassador to visit him He did, however, receive M Lipski on the Thursday night The Ambassador then tried to make contact with Warsaw, but found that the Germans had stopped all the means of communication with Poland

That night Hitler's proposals were broadcast At dawn next morning the German armies invaded Poland

War could have been avoided. The British and French Governments (who acted in consultation throughout the crisis), and

their representatives in Berlin and Warsaw, did everything in their power to preserve peace. Though resolute to defend themselves if attacked, the Poles knew the odds against them and were ready and waiting for discussion with the German Government. It was Hitler who made negotiation impossible. The war is his crime.

No British Prime Minister ever had the country more solidly with him than Chamberlain when he took up the German challenge. Speaking in the House of Commons on that Black Friday, he said:

No man can say that the Government could have done more to try to keep open the way for an honourable and equitable settlement of the dispute between Germany and Poland. Nor have we neglected any means of making it crystal clear to the German Government that, if they insisted on using force again in the manner in which they had used it in the past, we were resolved to oppose them by force.

Now that all the relevant documents are being made public we shall stand at the bar of history knowing that the responsibility for this terrible catastrophe lies on the shoulders of one man—the German Chancellor—who has not hesitated to plunge the world into misery in order to serve his own senseless ambitions.

Chamberlain proceeded to examine the statement in the German broadcast of the previous night that the Reich Government considered the Poles had rejected its proposals. The Poles had not seen the proposals, and the first time the British Government heard them was on the broadcast a few hours before war began. "In these circumstances," the Prime Minister said, "there is only one course open to us." The British and French Ambassadors in Berlin had been instructed to inform the German Government that unless operations against Poland were suspended and their forces withdrawn from Polish territory Britain and France would fulfil their obligations to Poland.

It now only remains for us to set our teeth and to enter upon this struggle, which we ourselves earnestly endeavoured to avoid, with determination to see it through to the end. We shall enter it with a clear conscience, with the support of the Dominions and the British Empire and the moral support of

the greater part of the world If, out of the struggle we again re-establish in the world the rules of good faith and the renunciation of force, even the sacrifices that will be entailed upon us will find their fullest justification

In that declaration, the Prime Minister was expressing the will of the Cabinet, of Parliament, and of the whole people. When the House met next day, there was a good deal of surprise that our entry into the war was not already announced. Some people thought the Government were weakening. But that was incredible, they could not go back on Chamberlain's words of the day before. Nor did any of them wish to—it was a united Cabinet. The delay had only one cause. It was important that Britain and France should act together, and, as Chamberlain told the House, it was not easy to synchronise action over the telephone.

No one who took any part in events then will forget that Saturday night. One cannot remember a time when the people were so deeply stirred. To say they realised that the national honour was engaged is to indicate their temper very feebly. The anxiety, the sense of urgency, denoted the deepest personal concern, to many, every hour that passed without the final decisive act was a torture.

The die was cast before the House met again. Next morning the British Ambassador in Berlin presented to the German Government a final note stating that unless, by eleven o'clock, they agreed at once to withdraw their troops from Poland Britain would be in the war against them. No reply had been received at eleven¹ and at 11.15 on that beautiful Sunday morning the Prime Minister broadcast from 10, Downing Street that "this country is at war with Germany." Hitler, he said, "had evidently made up his mind to attack Poland whatever happened, and

¹ Ribbentrop waited until 11.20 before handing to Sir Nevile Henderson the German reply. It was a flat refusal of the British demand for the withdrawal of the German forces from Poland. The pretence was set up that they were defending themselves against Polish aggression. Further—and this was impudent pretence—it was alleged that a reasonable settlement of the differences between Germany and Poland had been prevented by the British Government. This fiction of British war-guilt was the main staple of Hitler's proclamations to the German people and the German Army.

although he now says he put forward reasonable proposals which were rejected by the Poles, that is not a true statement ”

His action shows convincingly that there is no chance of expecting that this man will ever give up his practice of using force to gain his will He can only be stopped by force We and France are to-day, in fulfilment of our obligations, going to the aid of Poland who is so bravely resisting this wicked and unprovoked attack on her people We have a clear conscience We have done all that any country could do to establish peace The situation in which no word given by Germany's ruler could be trusted, and no people or country could feel themselves safe, has become intolerable And now that we have resolved to finish it, I know that you will all play your part in calmness and courage

Now, may God bless you all May He defend the right It is the evil things that we shall be fighting against—brute force, bad faith, injustice, oppression, and persecution—and against them I am certain the right will prevail

Parliament, meeting in the afternoon, gave unquestioning support to the Government's decision The time-limit set by France ended six hours later than our own, and at five o'clock she also was at war with Germany

The greatest trial of the nation and the Empire was beginning In many important respects we were still unready The armed forces which, with the support of our Allies, would win the war, were yet in the making Years were to pass before the production of munitions was equal to the need But there was one respect in which the British peoples, at home and overseas, were supremely ready They were united as never before, there was no limit to the sacrifices they would make for a cause they knew to be just, they had a faith in victory that would not waver in the darkest days Who can doubt that this complete moral equipment sprang from the conviction that our hands were clean, that the war was forced on the world by the evil ambitions of bad men and that our statesmen had done everything in their power to bring matters in dispute to the arbitrament of reason and justice?

The immense importance of this was declared by Mr Churchill

in the House of Commons on the first day of the war, when he said

In this solemn hour it is a consolation to recall and to dwell upon our repeated efforts for peace. All have been ill-starred, but all have been faithful and sincere.

This is of the highest moral value—and not only moral value, but practical value—at the present time, because the wholehearted concurrence of scores of millions of men and women whose co-operation is indispensable, and whose comradeship and brotherhood are indispensable, is the only foundation upon which the trial and tribulation of modern war can be endured and surmounted.

This moral conviction alone affords that ever fresh resilience which renews the strength and energy of people in long, doubtful, and dark days.

Mr Churchill had been an unsparing critic of the Government's earlier policy towards Germany, but it is not forcing these words beyond their plain meaning to say that they are a vindication of Neville Chamberlain.